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„The Rules of Art: An analysis of the subsidised theatre in London (1956-1976), based on Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of the artistic field.”

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*Individuals of genius show the way and set the
patterns, which common people then adopt and follow.
The rivalry of the patterns is the history of the world.*

William James (109)

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1. Introduction

To Pierre Bourdieu, a work of art is the “product of a vast operation of social alchemy” (1980: 81). Bourdieu’s concept of the artistic field has become the most influential sociological discussion of the construction of art in recent years, “and its distinctive ambitions to theoretical generality merit examination in empirical contexts other than those explored by Bourdieu himself” (Heise, and Tudor 166). The mid-20th century has developed to be considered one of the most prosperous periods in the history of British drama, and London was certainly the centre of attention and the country’s primary stage in that respect. From the 1950s onwards, theatre in London experienced two decades of immense diversity and expansion. The changes which occurred during this period, on both a structural and aesthetic level, were profound and remarkable: With the establishment of the Arts Council of Great Britain the sources of finance changed radically offering state subsidy to the theatre for the first time in the history of the country. As a result, new companies emerged and two large-scale national theatres were brought into existence almost at the same time. Shellard notes that a “substantial part of the history of post-war British theatre is the history of institutions” (1999: 6). Alternative styles of theatrical production developed out of an opposition against the dominant commercialism of the West End theatres. New writing was encouraged in a profession that was craving for vitality, and a young and modern approach to playwriting increasingly challenged the established tradition of the well-made play, both in terms of form and content. Equally, methods of acting, stage design and artistic direction changed radically. New audiences were soon attracted to the theatre, and the old burden of stage censorship under the Lord Chamberlain was finally abolished in 1968.

Bourdieu suggests relating the history of artistic works to the struggles that take place and relations that exist between different positions within the field of artistic production and reception. The London theatre of the fifties and sixties was dominated by an increasing struggle between two modes of theatrical production: that of large scale commercialism under the old regime of individualist managers, and that of permanent repertory companies subsidised by public money. The advent of state subsidy “brought about a gradual but

substantial change in the industry [because it] eventually led to the formation of a non-profit theatre sector” (Lee 295). Furthermore, with the establishment of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre of Great Britain, it appears that the entire status of the theatre in society was changing. The standing of the theatrical field in the overall field of power gained greater prominence and, among other aspects, this led to a process of “quasi-nationalisation of the arts”¹ throughout the sixties. Lacey argues that crucial to the 1950s was “the interconnection between specific texts, audiences and the institutions that produced them, all of which were subject to long-term social and economic developments” (59).

Bourdieu’s concept of field and habitus, and his ideas that each field of artistic production has its own dynamic, follows its own specific logic and seeks autonomy from the overall field of power, offer a new approach to describe the developments of British drama in the 1950s and 60s. In most accounts of post-war theatre in England, the year 1956 marks the beginning of the “symbolic revolution” surrounding the establishment of the English Stage Company, the premiere of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* and the emergence of the *Angry Young Men*. That hegemonic view of post-war drama has been challenged over the last years, and this diploma thesis attempts to contribute to the ongoing search for a new approach to the post-war period in British theatre. To compress the foremost artistic and structural achievements of two decades into a single diploma thesis naturally demands an intensely selective approach. While concentrating on the overall development of the field, modes of theatrical production and the formation of a non-profit subsidised sector, a number of developments, influential characters or institutions must be touched on only briefly, or omitted altogether. A brief chapter on Bourdieu’s theory of the literary (etc.) field will introduce the reader to a number of ideas within Bourdieu’s concept in order to provide a methodological frame for the analysis of the three major subsidised theatre companies in London between 1956 and 1976.

Trying to present the events as evolutionary rather than revolutionary, and viewing the period as one of reorganisation and expansion, this thesis concentrates on only a few chosen characters and institutions. It will call

¹ Kershaw 2004: 303. Kershaw further: “The appointment of Jenny Lee as first ever Minister for the Arts in 1964 [...] was emblematic of the new dispensation” (2004: 303).

attention to some significant aspects and relations, attempt to draw connections not previously drawn and to find its own approach to, and narrative of, the developments in the London theatre scene of the post-war decades. Central to the argument are not dramatists but producing and mediating agents such as Peter Hall, Laurence Olivier, George Devine and Kenneth Tynan. One of the underlying questions of this thesis, therefore, is how a handful of charismatic individuals can influence and shape the face of a whole nation's theatre. What possibilities did they face, how did they react and what resulted from their actions in a time when state subsidy first became available to the arts in Great Britain? Furthermore, as Bourdieu argues that the artistic field is a "universe of belief where the fetishism of the 'creator' is progressively generated" (1996: 189), this thesis will put an emphasis on the ways in which artists and their work are constructed and look at several aspects in the process of making theatrical reputation (see Zarhy-Levo 2008).

The very functioning of any artistic field is the struggle between orthodoxy and heresy, between established agents in prominent positions, trying to perpetuate the prevailing order, and new entrants to the field, attempting to break with the existing order and enforce new modes of production and legitimisation. The rationality of any artistic field is grounded on the agents' orientation towards art for art's sake, autonomy and symbolic consecration. The logic of the field, and the positions and relations within it, form the key point of departure for analysis. How can the logic or functioning of the theatrical field in mid-century London be described in terms of struggles and relations between operative agents in the field? What is legitimate theatre, and who has the power to define it? The struggle over artistic legitimacy has been prominent in the history of British drama. The Theatres Act of 1737 defined 'legitimate' theatre "by licensing the performance of spoken drama by only two companies" (Eyre, and Wright 321). The Lord Chamberlain defined what 'legitimate' theatre was by denying a license to plays the stage censor didn't regard fit for the British stage. The theatre of the mid-20th century, however, continually attempted to break with the idea of one definition of 'legitimate' theatre. Doing so, the London theatre accomplished, temporarily, a very high degree of autonomy from external determinants in the late fifties and early sixties. In that short period – a time of intense theatrical struggle – structural changes and artistic innovations could

occur that came to dominate British theatre of the second half of the 20th century.

“After a certain time, when one has got rid of one’s desire to exhibit oneself,” states George Devine, “the creation of conditions in theatre is the only interesting thing left” (qtd. in Wardle 1978: 157). The desire to create conditions marked the work of Devine, Peter Hall and Laurence Olivier. They were all theatrical idealists, but they also knew that the creation of the right conditions was a prerequisite in order to fulfil their ideals. Commanding a certain “feel for the theatrical game”, they all reached dominant positions in the field from where they could operate with greater powers. Among few others, it was them who created the conditions under which the whole field of London theatre could start to flourish and produce outstanding artistic works. While the 1940s saw a grave opposition between theatrical idealists and pragmatists (cf. Billington 2007: 45), from the 1950s onwards idealists started to act in an increasingly pragmatic way, and the advent of state subsidy supported them significantly in their goals. “While commercial theatre was continuingly precarious,” argues Billington, “subsidised institutions had broadened the possibilities”. Once the right conditions existed in the London field of theatrical production, the *Golden Generation* of British theatre could begin to prosper: “opportunity”, Hall knows, “creates talent” (*Tis Pity* 12).

2. The Field of Cultural Production

2.1. Introduction – Overcoming a False Dichotomy

Sociology regards art and culture as a social fact and thus artistic production as a social process which has to be analysed by means of sociological methods. Pierre Bourdieu² denies a piece of art's "*status of exception*" (1996: xvi), meaning that it escapes by definition all rational understanding, and tries to overcome its "*resistance to analysis*" (1996: xvii) by positioning artistic production in a global system of dependencies on economic, social and cultural conditions. He attempts to explain literary (etc.) creation through the dynamics and forces operating in the field of cultural production. Bourdieu's theory of the literary field was first published in 1992 as a collection of texts in *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, although the theoretical foundations for his concept are to be found much earlier in his general account of cultural production. Bourdieu grounds his argument that artistic practices and products are based upon social practice on a detailed analysis of the French literary scene constituting itself as an autonomous field of artistic production after 1848. The study revolves around the question implied by the title, namely whether the production of works of art follows specific rules and whether these rules can be explained scientifically. Central to Bourdieu's theory is the concept of the literary³ field, a socially constructed, relatively autonomous field of production with specific governing forces and principles of perception and consecration (cf. Magerski 9). Within this field operate two structures, namely "the structure of objective relations between positions in the field of production (and among the producers who occupy them), and the structure of objective relations among the position-takings in the space of works" (Bourdieu 1996: 233). The *relationship between those two structures* is the very core of a science of works of art.

Bourdieu argues that scientific analysis of literary works has always failed to acknowledge a "homology between the space of works defined by their

² Pierre Félix Bourdieu was born in Denguin on 1 August 1930. He studied philosophy at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris before initiating his work in anthropology and sociology. He is best known for his book *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgment of Taste*. Bourdieu died in 2002 in Paris.

³ Or any other kind of field; art and literature being one area among others for application of the concept of the field.

essentially symbolic content [...], and the space of positions in the field of production" (1996: 205) and thus struggles with the alternatives between either internal (formal/structural) or external (historical/sociological) analysis. In a sociology of art and literature, "the opposition between a formalism born of the codification of artistic practices which have achieved a high degree of autonomy, and a reductionism bent on bringing artistic forms directly back to social formations, had obscured the fact that what the two currents had in common was a lack of recognition of the *field of production* as a space of objective relations" (Bourdieu 1996: 181). The dichotomy between subjectivism and objectivism faces all sciences of cultural works and social history. However, the use of a concept such as field "[allows] us to escape the alternatives of internal interpretation and external explanation [...] by reminding us of the existence of social microcosms, separate and autonomous spaces in which works are generated" (Bourdieu 1996: 181). Bourdieu offers a model to overcome these false dichotomies between internal and external readings, between literary and sociological analysis, and between 'looking at texts' as opposed to 'looking at institutions'. In search for a compromise between a subjectivist approach (i.e. the charismatic ideology of the artist as 'creator') and an objectivist approach (i.e. concentrating on the objective conditions alone which structure practice independent of human consciousness), Bourdieu stresses the importance of objective social relations in which literary practice occurs without, however, ignoring the social agent as producer of the work of art.

In an attempt to transcend this false dichotomy, Bourdieu sought to develop a concept of agent free from the voluntarism and idealism of subjectivist accounts and a concept of social space free from the deterministic and mechanistic causality inherent in many objectivist approaches. (Johnson 4)

Through the concept of *habitus*, Bourdieu's model reintroduces the notion of the agent which structuralism excludes from social analysis. By grounding the agent's action in objective social relations with the concept of *field*, however, he doesn't fall into "the idealism of Romantic conceptions of the artist as creator (or *subject*)" (Johnson 2).

Bourdieu's model therefore transcends false dichotomies between an internal ('tautegorical') reading of a work and external ('allegorical') analysis which is

usually associated with sociology. Through his concept of *field* and *habitus*, states Bourdieu, “we escape from the correlative dilemma of the charismatic image of artistic activity as pure, disinterested creation by an isolated artist, and the reductionist vision which claims to explain the act of production and its product in terms of their conscious or unconscious external functions” (1983: 34). Bourdieu’s theories on the field of cultural production thus “constitute a forceful argument against both Kantian notions of the universality of the aesthetic and ideologies of artistic and cultural autonomy from external determinants” (Johnson 2). Artistic production is understood as a “communicative act” (Bourdieu 1997b: 76) between artistic agents and therefore as a social process. The idea of artistic production as collective action breaking with the naïve vision of the individual creator was not invented by Bourdieu. Howard Becker (1974, 1976, 1982) argued that works of art “can be understood by viewing them as the result of the co-ordinated activities of all the people whose co-operation is necessary in order that the work should occur as it does” (Becker 1976: 703).

The analytical model of the field proposed by Bourdieu is yet the most powerful sociological approach to the formation of art. In order to define the foundations of a “science of works of art” (1996: 175), Bourdieu seems to “abolish the singularity of the ‘creator’ in favour of the relations which made the work intelligible” (1996: xix) and therefore breaks with idealism and literary hagiography. Though some might argue this reduces or destroys the literary experience, Bourdieu suggests that scientific analysis of the production and reception of a work of art, in fact, intensifies it. The Romantic idea of creative genius must be abolished only to be rediscovered “at the end of the task of reconstructing the space in which the author finds himself encompassed and included as a point” (1996: xix). Through recognition of this point in the literary space one can truly understand and start to appreciate “the singularity of that position and of the person who occupies it, and the extraordinary effort which [...] was necessary to make it exist” (1996: xix). Bourdieu looks for the principle of a work of art’s existence in the logic of the field in which it was produced. A piece of art is treated as “an intentional sign haunted and regulated by something else, of which it is also a symptom” (1996: xx). Therefore, in his main work on art and literature, *Les Règles de l’art*, Bourdieu offers “a vision more

true and, ultimately, more reassuring, because less superhuman, of the highest achievements of the human enterprise" (1996: xx).

2.2. Field

The notion of *field*⁴ provides an opportunity to go beyond internal analysis and external explication of works of art. It forms the core of Bourdieu's model for social analysis in diverse fields of activity.

Der soziale Mikrokosmos, in dem die kulturellen Werke produziert werden, das literarische, künstlerische, wissenschaftliche usw. Feld, ist ein Raum von objektiven Relationen zwischen Positionen – der des etablierten Künstlers und der des „artiste maudit“ zum Beispiel –, und was sich in ihm abspielt, ist nur zu verstehen, wenn man jeden Akteur und jede Institution in ihren objektiven Relationen zu allen anderen bestimmt. Diese spezifischen Kräfteverhältnisse sowie die Kämpfe um ihren Erhalt oder ihre Veränderung bilden den Entstehungshorizont für die Strategien der Produzenten, die Kunstform, die sie vertreten, die Bündnisse, die sie schließen, die Schulen, die sie begründen, und zwar mittels der von ihm bestimmten spezifischen Interessen. (Bourdieu 1998: 62)

An analysis of cultural texts cannot isolate these texts from the social conditions of their production, circulation and consumption. "Literature, art and their respective producers" always depend on a "complex institutional framework which authorizes, enables, empowers and legitimizes them" (Johnson 10) and which must therefore be incorporated into an analysis of artistic works. A *field* is that framework and is described by Bourdieu as a "network of objective relations (of domination or subordination, of complementarity or antagonism, etc.) between positions" (1996: 231), each position being defined by its objective relationship with other positions. Bourdieu states that "the construction of the field is the logical preamble for the construction of the social trajectory" of an agent (1996: 214). By the term *trajectory* he describes the "series of positions successively occupied" by the same agent in the consecutive states of the field (1996: 214).

To different *positions* correspond homologous *position-takings*, i.e. literary works but also political acts and discourses, etc. In defining the literary and artistic field as, inseparably, a field of positions and a field of position-takings,

⁴ The concept of *field* (champ) was first described by Bourdieu in 1966 but not used systematically to describe the subfield of literary production until 1992. For a detailed discussion of the term see: Jurt 1995: 71ff.

Bourdieu applies a *relational* (rather than *structuralist*) mode⁵ of thought to cultural production that breaks with the “ordinary or substantialist perception of the social world in order to see each element in terms of its relationships with all other elements in a system from which it derives its meaning and function” (Johnson 6). The structure of a field is determined by the relations between the positions occupied by individuals, groups, and their respective position-takings. A field is thus a dynamic concept. A change of an individual agent’s position within the field entails a change in the overall structure of the whole field, and such change occurs continuously.

As the term is used by Bourdieu, a field is a “separate social universe having its own laws of functioning independent of those of politics and the economy” (1986a: 162). However, all cultural fields exist in a subordinate and dominated position within the broader field of power. The field of artistic production is relatively autonomous within the field of power as its principle of legitimacy is not based upon the possession of economic or political capital. Even though structurally homologous, each field has its very own logic. External determinants such as economic or political events can have an effect only through transformation in the structure of the field itself. As an autonomous social universe, the field *refracts* or *translates* external determinants in terms of its own logic, and only thus can they have an effect on the logic of the development of works (cf. Bourdieu 1986a: 164). The degree of autonomy of a field is defined by its ability to reject external determinants and obey only its own specific logic: Autonomy “may be measured by the importance of the effect of translation or of *refraction* which [the field’s] specific logic imposes on external influences or commissions [...]” (Bourdieu, 1996: 220).

The concept of field bears analogy to the idea of artistic production as a sort of “social game” which has its own specific rules. Each agent who takes part in the game attempts to legitimise his actions, and therefore tries to prove his right as a legitimate player of the game. “The invention of the idea of a *writer* is inseparable from the progressive invention of a particular social game which establishes its autonomy, i.e. its specific laws of functioning, within the field of power” (Bourdieu 1986a: 163). As in different games of sports, different fields

⁵ Bourdieu borrows the term from Cassirer. See Cassirer, Ernst. *Substance et Fonction*. Paris: Minuit, 1977. See Bourdieu 1996: 181 and Bourdieu 1983: 29.

require different qualifications for players to take part. Consequently, an agent's goals and investments vary according to each field. It is the field that defines those interest and stakes relevant to the game. This is what Bourdieu calls the *illusio* of the game, namely the shared belief of all agents in the field or "the collective adhesion to the game that is both cause and effect of the existence of the game" (Bourdieu 1996: 167). Each field has its very own *illusio* and therefore *what is at stake* varies from field to field. The *illusio* determines interests and strategies in the game, and all agents struggle within this social arena in pursuit of best possible positions using their various forms of capital as an "investment in the game" (Bourdieu 1996: 227). In the field of artistic production this struggle is predominately a struggle over the monopoly of the *power of consecration* of producers and products:

One of the central stakes in the literary (etc.) rivalries is the monopoly of literary legitimacy, that is, among other things, the monopoly of the power to say with authority who is authorized to call himself writer (etc.) or even to say who is a writer and who has the authority to say who is a writer; (Bourdieu 1996: 224)

These struggles over the definition of the mode of legitimate cultural production "contribute to a continual reproduction of belief in the game, interest in the game and its stakes, the *illusio* – of which the struggles are also the product" (Bourdieu 1996: 227). Acknowledging the *illusio* of the game is, to Bourdieu, the prerequisite to take part in the game. All participating agents are unequally capable of having an influence on the structure of the field and enforcing their interests, depending on their social position and amount of power they have within this specific realm of activity. All cultural fields are a result of permanent struggles over artistic legitimacy and are therefore structured by the distribution of power and the distribution of available positions. Bourdieu concludes that "it is in the very *struggle* that the history of the field is made; it is through struggles that it is temporalized." (Bourdieu 1996: 157) Consequently, the existing structures of a field at any given moment are always the result of the history of the struggles within it and thus "the whole history of the field is immanent in each of its states" (Bourdieu 1996: 243).

Therefore, Bourdieu defines the literary and artistic field in terms of the positions, power relations and struggles of different agents, groups and institutions. He tries to explain the specific economy of artistic practices by

analysing the concrete social situation in which they are produced, distributed and received. “To speak of ‘field’,” argues Bourdieu “is to recall that literary works are produced in a particular social universe endowed with particular institutions and obeying specific laws” (Bourdieu 1986a: 163). It is, however, not within the field alone but within the *relation between agent and social space*, between a habitus and a field, that Bourdieu sees the “fundamental law” (Bourdieu 1996: 228) of artistic production. Thus, when one has characterised the different positions within the field of cultural production, “one can come back to particular agents and to different personal properties that more or less predispose them to occupy these positions and to realize the potentialities inscribed there” (Bourdieu 1996: 85).

2.3. Habitus

Bourdieu’s model “combines an analysis of objective social structures with an analysis of the genesis, within particular individuals, of the socially constituted mental structures which generate practice” (Johnson 4). The term *habitus*⁶ is used to describe those mental structures. In Bourdieu’s formal definition, *habitus* is the system of

durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor. (1990: 53)

More easily, habitus can be described as a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1986b: 189), which implies that agents do not act consciously obedient to rules and according to calculated strategies. Rather, their practices and perceptions are generated through a set of dispositions – their habitus. It is a form of practical sense (*sense pratique*) which tells its possessor how to act according to his situation (cf. Bourdieu 1998: 41). “Wie können Verhaltensweisen geregelt sein, ohne dass ihnen eine Befolgung von Regeln zugrunde liegt?” (qtd. in Rehbein

⁶ The term *habitus* was not invented by Bourdieu but first defined by Erwin Panofsky in his work *Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism* in 1967 as a mediating concept between structure and practice to overcome the antinomy consciousness/subconsciousness, finalism/determinism. See Jurt 1995: 79-80.

86), asks Bourdieu, and finds the answer within the concept of habitus: “Der Begriff ermöglicht es, die Handelnden nicht nur als strukturalistischen Träger der Struktur zu erfassen, ohne dabei jedoch in den Individualismus zu verfallen“ (qtd. in Rehbein 86). Bourdieu concludes that an action is more than following a rule and that an agent can make an unpredictable move in the social game on the basis of the system of his dispositions. *Habitus* paradoxically describes how practice can be oriented towards a goal without being specifically determined by it (cf. Jurt 2008: 58). An agent’s habitus thus only exists in relation to a certain field. To enter a specific game one must be accepted as a legitimate player, and therefore one must possess the habitus which predisposes one to enter the field. Compare how a talented football player might not necessarily be a legitimate player of tennis or golf.

What Bourdieu is interested in is what happens when an agent’s habitus encounters the system of objective relations within a field of cultural production:

It is in the relationship between the habituses and the fields to which they are adjusted to a greater or lesser degree (according to the degree to which they are produced by them) that the foundation of all the scales of utility is generated: that is to say, the fundamental adhesion to the game, the *illusio*, recognition of the game and of the utility of the game, belief in the value of the game and in its stakes – the basis of all the allocations of meaning and of value. (Bourdieu 1996: 173)

Artistic works and art as such essentially result from the constellation between the artistic world and an artist’s habitus. The whole “game” of artistic production is based upon this relationship between agent and system as the *illusio*, the shared belief and “interested participation in the game is established in the conjunctural relationship between a habitus and a field” (Bourdieu 1996: 228).

It has to be noted that most of Bourdieu’s terms, especially *habitus* and *field* are fundamentally dynamic and have had varying definitions over the years (cf. Rehbein 80). Crucial to understand is that an agent’s practices originate from his individual and class habitus and thus the term will be used in this paper to describe an agent’s behavioural pattern in relation to the objective structure of the field.

2.4. Capital

The field of artistic production is characterised by struggles for desirable positions, relations of power, interests and strategies of its occupants, and certainly by the forms of capital which dominate and determine those structures. In order to reach the best possible position, an agent can “use” whatever he possesses and whatever *counts* in the field. *Capital*, therefore, is a term Bourdieu uses for any sort of legitimate resource that an agent can invest in the social game. It is the very functioning of the field that all agents and institutions try to change the field to their advantage, i.e. in a way that their own resources and practices increase in value. Everyone tries to make the best out of their capabilities, and this process contributes to a constant, yet *economic* change of configurations within the field. “The structure of the field, i.e. of the space of positions, is nothing other than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of the external or specific profits (such as literary prestige) which are at stake in the field” (Bourdieu 1983: 30). In Bourdieu’s theory of the field, agents are not defined by their social class membership but rather by the amount and kinds of capital they possess.

Bourdieu therefore developed the concept of *symbolic power* which is based upon various forms of capital and doesn’t reduce the term to an economic meaning (cf. Johnson 7). The four dominant categories of capital are economic capital, cultural capital, social capital and, most importantly for the field of artistic production, symbolic capital. *Economic capital* describes all possessions which are directly convertible into financial value. This sub-category of capital comes closest to how Marx used the term. *Cultural capital* is any form of knowledge, skill or education. Bourdieu furthermore defines the term as “an internalized code or a cognitive acquisition which equips the social agent with empathy towards, appreciation for or competence in deciphering cultural relations and cultural artefacts” (Johnson 7). Relevant in terms of the literary field is that an agent who receives a piece of art must also possess cultural capital to understand it or, in other words, “a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded” (Johnson 7). Jurt (2008: 73) stresses the great importance of the notion of cultural capital in Bourdieu’s theories and

differentiates between three kinds: *incorporated* (permanent dispositions), *objectified* (cultural artefacts such as books or instruments) and *institutionalised* (officially certified) cultural capital. Academic titles, for example, are one sort of institutionalised cultural capital which can grant access to positions others can't reach in the field through their lack of this form of capital. *Social Capital* is the entity of resources resulting from actual and potential social relations such as friendships, business networks or any other sort of social networks. It is common sense to acknowledge the importance of a personal "relationship with the powerful" (Bourdieu 1996: 57) as it bears great potential to improve one's own position in the field. The final sub-category is *symbolic capital*, which refers to the degree of accumulated prestige, honour and reputation, so to say, collective appreciation and consecration. Symbolic capital always stands in relation to one of the other forms of capital. It is any form of capital that can be perceived by others and therefore a crucial source of power. Bourdieu generally differentiates between those four different kinds of capital, even though every other resource might as well be seen as capital as long as it is a legitimate investment in the economy of the field. Linguistic capital, for example, is often regarded as a sort of cultural capital but can also be acknowledged as its own category. One's habitus, too, is a sort of incorporated capital.

The specific logic of each field (economic, political, scientific, cultural, etc.) revolves around accumulation of capital and its agents' strategies to derive maximum profits from their investment. All positions in the field, states Bourdieu, "depend, in their very existence, and in the determinations they impose on their occupants, on their actual and potential situation in the structure of the field – that is to say, in the structure and distribution of those kinds of capital (or of power) whose possession governs the obtaining of specific profits (such as literary prestige) put into play on the field" (Bourdieu 1996: 231). Fields differ in the forms of capital which dominate their structure and give their respective possessors the greatest power to influence the field to the advantage of their position. Therefore, it has to be asked which particular kind of capital dominates the struggle for artistic legitimacy and that is, clearly, *symbolic capital*.

The only legitimate accumulation, for the author as for the critic, for the art dealer as for the publisher or theatre director, consists in making a

name for oneself, a name that is known and recognized, the capital of consecration – implying a power to consecrate objects [...] or people [...], and hence of giving them value, and of making profits from this operation. (Bourdieu 1996: 148)

Bourdieu doesn't deny art's dependency on economic resources; however, it is generally acknowledged that true art is not about money but about art. An artist with exclusively economic capital and in pursuit of economic profit maximisation will never be accepted as a "legitimate player" or taken seriously by other agents in the field as he doesn't acknowledge the *illusio* of the game.

"'Economic' capital cannot guarantee the specific profits offered by the [literary] field [...] unless it is reconverted into symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1996: 148).

And those profits offered by the field of artistic production are, after all, primarily symbolic ones, i.e. prestige. Symbolic capital, to Bourdieu, is "a kind of 'economic' capital denied but recognized, and hence legitimate – a veritable credit, and capable of assuring, under certain conditions and in the long term, 'economic' profits" (Bourdieu 1996: 142). Material profits might be a convenient side effect an artist can experience by and by, but it is, however, the very quality of the artistic field that it is a *market for symbolic goods* (Bourdieu 1996: 141).

2.5. A Market for Symbolic Goods

Each field has its specific logic of functioning. The economic field, for example, follows a logic in which every agent strives for economic profit maximisation, within the political subfield everybody seeks political power, and within the scientific field all agents pursue primarily knowledge and understanding. The field of cultural production, however, is a *universe of belief* (Bourdieu 1986a: 164) in which agents pursue practices and objects which cannot be measured by their material value only.

This relatively autonomous universe [i.e. the artistic field] (which is to say, of course, that it is also relatively dependent, notably with respect to the economic field and the political field) makes a place for an inverse economy whose particular logic is based on the very nature of symbolic goods – realities with two aspects, merchandise and signification, with the specifically symbolic values and the market values remaining relatively independent of each other. (Bourdieu 1996: 141)

Therefore, artistic production distinguishes itself from the production of common objects in that "it must produce not only the object in its materiality, but also the value of this object, that is, the recognition of artistic legitimacy" (Bourdieu

1986a: 164). Jurt sees the originality of Bourdieu's approach exactly within this dual character of all cultural products: merchandise opposed to meaning and aesthetic value which cannot be traced back to its economic value (cf. 1995: 91). The production of art always follows a "specific logic of symbolic alchemy" (Bourdieu 1996: 148).

An analysis of artwork therefore has to take into account "not only the material production of the work but also the production of the value of the work or, what amounts to the same thing, of the belief in the value of the work" (Bourdieu 1996: 229). That is because symbolic values are not innate in cultural goods but have to be produced by authorities of selection and consecration within the field. As a result, a science of works of art has to look beyond the direct producers of art in its materiality (writers, painters, actors, etc.) and has to acknowledge the importance of "the ensemble of agents and institutions which participate in the production of the value of the work via the production of the belief in the value of art in general and in the distinctive value of this or that work of art" (Bourdieu 1996: 229). Bourdieu's method of field and habitus covers both the material and symbolic production of cultural works as it takes into account those multiple authorities of mediation and legitimisation which contribute to a work's meaning (cf. Jurt 1995: 92; Johnson 20). Due to the low degree of institutionalisation within the literary field there are no "official referees" (cf. Jurt 1995: 88) who decide over artistic legitimacy, although some agents are necessarily more powerful than others. Artistic legitimacy is always at stake in the field and each agent tries to reach out for it. Competition is one universal and invariant property of fields. Consequently, the field of artistic production always constitutes disputes over the monopoly of consecration, namely over the right to define producers as artists and products as art objects. Those struggles for definition contribute vastly to the production and reproduction of the *illusio*, the belief in the game and in the value of art.

The question remains who can thus be seen as the true producer of art and its value: "[T]he painter or the dealer, the writer or the publisher, the playwright or the theatre manager?" (Bourdieu 1980: 76). The ideology of pure artistic creation ignores all authorities of mediation who 'discover' products "which would otherwise remain a mere natural resource" (Bourdieu 1980: 76). Bourdieu argues that it is "not the artist but the field of production as a universe of belief

which produces the value of the work of art as a *fetish* by producing the belief in the creative power of the artist” (Bourdieu 1996: 229). Therefore, the symbolic production of the value of an artwork not only includes constituting the object as artistically valuable (*legitimate*) but also producing a belief in the aesthetic value of the individual agent as its producer. Bourdieu speaks of a “charismatic economy” (1997a: 37) of the field and concludes that it is the art community as a whole which consecrates and therefore creates the value of art and artists.

The principle of the effectiveness of acts of consecration resides in the field itself and nothing would be more futile than to search for the origin of ‘creative’ power [...] anywhere else than in this space of play as it was progressively established, that is to say, in the system of objective relations which constitute this space, in the struggle for which it provides the arena and in the specific form of belief engendered there. (Bourdieu 1996: 169)

As all struggles within the field of literary production are struggles over definition, the “existence of the writer, as fact and as value, is inseparable from the existence of the literary field as an autonomous universe endowed with specific principles of evaluation of practices and works” (Bourdieu 1986a: 162). From a critical point of view it can be argued that Bourdieu’s concept is less concerned with the nature of art *per se* and rather with the conditions in which works of art acquire meaning and value (cf. Codd 157). His analyses always revolve more closely around the producers of art than around their works. However, even after sociological analysis one can still regard artworks as “sacred” and consecrated objects but one has to acknowledge that they are the “product of an immense enterprise of *symbolic alchemy* involving the collaboration, with the same conviction but very unequal profits, of a whole set of agents engaged in the field of production” (Bourdieu 1996: 170).

2.6. Heteronomy and Autonomy

The degree of consecration is one of the two crucial axes on which Bourdieu maps the field of artistic production. Cultural products, social agents and particular institutions are, however, also positioned in terms of their degree of heteronomy or autonomy:

The literary or artistic field is at all times the site of a struggle between the two principles of hierarchization: the heteronomous principle, favourable to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g. ‘bourgeois art’) and the autonomous principle (e.g. ‘art for art’s

sake'), which those of its advocates who are least endowed with specific capital tend to identify with degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise. (Bourdieu 1983: 40)

A hierarchy is therefore established in the relations among the different kinds of capital and among their holders. Under heteronomy, "the value of the work derives from criteria external to the domain of the producers themselves – 'bourgeois art' consecrated by those wielding economic and/or political power" (Heise, and Tudor 166). The *principle of external hierarchization* measures value by indices of commercial success and recognition by the 'general public'. It proves that the field of cultural production occupies a dominated position within the field of power as external constraints and demands govern its logic (cf. Bourdieu 1996: 216-217). Under autonomy, however, art is regarded as relatively independent from the economy and pre-existing demand. The *principle of internal hierarchization*, favours artists "who are known and recognized by their peers and only by them" and who "owe their prestige [...] to the fact that they make no concessions to the demand of the 'general public'" (Bourdieu 1996: 217). It becomes a fundamental criterion of evaluation whether works are made for the public or have to make their own public (cf. Bourdieu 1996: 218). Bourdieu concludes that

[t]he degree of autonomy of a field of cultural production is revealed to the extent that the principle of external hierarchization there is subordinated to the principle of internal hierarchization: the greater the autonomy, the more the symbolic relationship of forces is favourable to producers who are the most independent of demands, and the more the break tends to be noticeable between the two poles of the field. (Bourdieu 1996: 217)

Those two poles are the opposing sub-fields of *restricted production*, which concerns what we usually think of as 'high' art and which produces cultural goods only for other producers (who are also their direct competitors), and that of *large scale production*, which produces for 'the public at large' and thus finds itself "symbolically excluded and discredited" (cf. Bourdieu 1996: 217 and 1985: 115). While the latter "submits to the laws of competition for the conquest of the largest possible market, the field of restricted production tends to develop its own criteria for the evaluation of its products" (Bourdieu 1985: 115). In the field of restricted cultural production, "the hierarchy of authority is based on different forms of symbolic profit" as "the stakes of competition between agents are

largely symbolic, involving prestige, consecration and artistic celebrity” (Johnson 15). In the most autonomous sector of the field the economy of practices is based on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies: business, power and even institutionalised cultural authority (cf. Bourdieu 1983: 39). The functioning of this specific universe is “defined by a ‘refusal’ of the ‘commercial’ which is in fact a collective disavowal of commercial interests and profits” (Bourdieu 1980: 75) even though the field yet contains a form of economic rationality. Bourdieu describes it as an “inverse world” (1996: 58) or an “economic world reversed” (1983: 29) and confirms his conception of *field* as “a world apart, subject to its own laws” (1996: 48). Johnson further concludes that “[i]t is in this sense that the cultural field is a universe of belief. The symbolic power of this sub-field’s products is sustained by a vast social apparatus encompassing museums, galleries, libraries, the educational system, literary and art histories, centres for the performing arts and so forth” (15).

Heise and Tudor (181) criticise Bourdieu’s model in that it regards the opposition of heteronomy and autonomy as reflecting a universal feature of all fields of artistic production, and not as “a specific ideological product of modernity which applies neither to the pre- nor the postmodern artistic worlds.” In search for a *Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu always combines theoretical ideas with empirical research. His model of the artistic field is based on an analysis of the Western European art world of the modern era which saw the emergence of art as an autonomous enterprise fundamentally opposed to commerce. Heise and Tudor (183) suggest that these antagonistic positions of autonomous, pure art and heteronomous, commercial art are therefore “less a general ‘principle’ than a socially and historically specific product of art ideology as it developed in a particular time and place” which does not need to be a relevant distinction to apply to all fields of art.

2.7. The Field of Possibles

Bourdieu refers to the dualism of the bourgeois and the vanguard poles when he describes “the synchronic oppositions between antagonistic positions (dominant/dominated, consecrated/novice, orthodox/heretic, old/young, etc.)” from which the very structure of the field of cultural production arises (1996:

239). Defining the artistic field as an area of constant struggle over artistic legitimacy, all fields are necessarily built upon this constitutive opposition between orthodoxy and heresy, i.e.

the struggle between those who espouse conservatism because of the dominant position they temporarily occupy in the field (by virtue of their specific capital), that is to say, they defend routine and routinization, the banal and banalization, in a word, they defend the established symbolic order, and those who are inclined to a heretical rupture, to the critique of established forms, to the subversion of the prevailing models and to a return to the purity of origins. (Bourdieu 1996: 206)

It is, almost by definition, up to new entrants of the field (i.e. those most deprived of specific capital) to break with the established symbolic order and to initiate change (cf. Bourdieu 1996: 239). As with any form of innovation, their primary goal is to differentiate themselves from and oppose established positions. Eventually they will be accepted as legitimate by the field and reach a symbolically more dominant position themselves, which calls yet again for a heretical break with the existing symbolic order. The artistic field therefore constitutes itself as a field of “permanent revolution” (Bourdieu 1996: 124). The conflict between orthodoxy and heresy defines its central dialectic of change.

It is the very functioning and necessity of the field to renew itself. For innovation to take place, however, it is not merely enough for a resourceful agent to enter the field and break its symbolic order but it is the field itself which conditions change:

For bold strokes of innovation or revolutionary research to have some chance of even being conceived, it is necessary for them to exist in a potential state at the heart of the system of already realized possibles, like *structural lacunae* which appear to wait for and call for fulfilment, like potential directions of development, possible avenues of research. Moreover, they must have some chance of being received, meaning accepted and recognized as “reasonable”. (Bourdieu 1996: 235)

The structure of the field cannot be regarded as timeless but has to be seen in its historical context (cf. Jurt 1995: 94). One development builds upon the other. Like a mathematician works “ceaselessly on the outcome of the work of previous mathematicians” (Bourdieu 1996: 242), artists never act independent from the history of their field and what others did before them. All struggles which formerly defined the field constitute the history of the field and are objectified in its structure (cf. Bourdieu 1996: 243). Possibilities of action are both historically and socially defined. The literary field is an “oriented space,

pregnant with position-takings identifiable as objective potentialities, things ‘to be done’, ‘movements’ to launch, reviews to create, adversaries to combat, established position-takings to be ‘overtaken’ and so forth” (Bourdieu 1996: 235), and those structural lacunae are what Bourdieu defines as *the space of possibles*.

The space of possibles is the system of differential positions and position-takings in relation to which every agent and every new work have to define themselves. The structure of the field, i.e. the history and current “result” of its struggles, defines and provides for each agent a possible frame of action depending on the set of dispositions he brings with himself into the field (his habitus). Structural lacunae don’t exist for every agent in the field but only for those capable of filling them.

[T]he field of possible position-takings is open to the *sense of placement*. [...] the structural lacunae of a system of possibles, which is undoubtedly never given *as such* to the subjective experience of agents [...], cannot be filled by the magic virtue of a sort of tendency of the system to complete itself. The summons contained in these gaps is only understood by those who, as a result of their position in the field and their habitus, and of the [...] relationship between the two, are free enough from the constraints inscribed in the structure to be able to recognize as applying to them a virtuality which, in a sense, only exists for them. This gives their enterprise, after the event, the appearance of predestination. (Bourdieu 1996: 239)

In other words, it has to be the right time and the right place for the right artist to succeed with his project. Capital and habitus are, so to say, the players “trump cards” (Mahar, Harker, and Wilkes 11) in the social game. They define the agent’s possibilities inherent in the field and therefore determine his style of play, success and failure. The better an agent complies with the game, the more valuable his capital and the more distinct his “feel for the game” is, the more easily he can foresee possibilities of action and the more successful his innovations will be. “[T]he ‘creative project’”, states Bourdieu (1996: 128), “[arises] from the convergence of the particular dispositions that a producer (or a group of producers) brings into the field (due to his previous trajectory and his position in the field) and the space of possibles inscribed in the field”. It is in that way that habitus is understood as a mediator between positions and position-takings. From an agent’s habitus result his strategies of action. *Strategies* are not understood as tactics based on conscious calculation. An agent’s strategy is

the “intuitive product of ‘knowing’ the rules of the game” (Mahar, Harker, and Wilkes 17), i.e. his orientation of practice based on his position and potentialities in the field.

2.8. Conclusion – Bourdieu

Bourdieu’s concept of the field of cultural production can be described as a “radical contextualization” which takes into consideration “not only works themselves, seen relationally within the space of available possibilities and within the historical development of such possibilities, but also producers of works in terms of their strategies and trajectories, based on their individual and class habitus, as well as their objective position within the field” (Johnson 9). Bourdieu concludes that a science of cultural works presupposes three operations:

First, one must analyse the position of the literary (etc.) field within the field of power, and it’s evolution in time. Second, one must analyse the internal structure of the literary (etc.) field, a universe obeying its own laws of functioning and transformation, meaning the structure of objective relations between positions occupied by individuals and groups placed in a situation of competition for legitimacy. (1996: 214)

Such analysis includes not only the positions occupied by producers of a work of art (e.g. writers) but also those occupied by all the instances of mediation, consecration and legitimisation (e.g. critics, theatre directors, literary managers, academies etc.), which contribute to make cultural products what they are.

Bourdieu continues:

And finally, the analysis involves the genesis of the habitus of occupants of these positions, that is, the systems of dispositions which, being the product of a social trajectory and of a position within the literary (etc.) field, find in this position a more or less favourable opportunity to be realized. (1996: 214)

An analysis of the artistic landscape of a specific era thus has to examine the relation between the space of possibles offered by the field at that particular time and the artists (i.e. their specific habitus) who were best conditioned to operate in it. Bourdieu transcends the opposition between objectivism and subjectivism by transforming it into a “dialectical relationship between structure and agency” (Mahar, Harker, and Wilkes 1). The notion of field allows us to bridge the opposition between internal reading and external analysis without losing the benefits of either approach. Bourdieu combines an analysis of

objective social structures with an analysis of socially constituted mental structures within individuals which generate practice. To understand the value of specific artworks one has to look at their production, circulation and consumption as symbolic goods. In *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, Bourdieu attempts to show that artistic creation is neither a solitary and merely individual process nor the exclusive result of social formations. Rather, it is the collaborative act of agents, dispositions and structural specifications of the specific social universe in which it takes place.

Bourdieu's model, built around the conceptual tools of *field* and *habitus*, seems more easily approachable when applied to a particular field at a particular time rather than as a theoretical construct as such. Adapting certain of his concepts as a methodological framework offers an effective opportunity to grasp the very core of a specific artistic period and its achievements. Especially since it is the focus of this paper to identify the relations of power and struggles over legitimacy at work in the subsidised London theatre scene in the mid-20th century it appears crucial to look at the most outstanding individuals in relation to the universe of which they were part. It is characteristic for that particular period of British theatre that those characters with the greatest amount of symbolic capital, therefore power and the greatest potential to revolutionise the field of theatrical production were, in fact, not writers but theatre producers, actors, directors and critics. Furthermore, in the theatrical canon the writer alone cannot be seen as the highest and singular authority of artistic production due to the fact that the immediate theatrical product, the performance, is the results of a collaborative act. Bourdieu's model justifies an approach which focuses more on impresarios, mediators and their respective institutions rather than on writers. However, an analysis of all agents involved and the entire field of theatrical production in London and Stratford at that time would exceed the limits of a diploma thesis by far. My analysis therefore concentrates on the trajectories and relations of a few of the most prominent agents who lead the *Golden Generation of British Theatre* to its fame.

The term 'Golden Generation' has [...] tended to be applied to a narrow, elite group of English theatre practitioners. [The phrase is used] to express the variety, dynamism, and vision of actors, directors, and writers that flourished in British theatre between 1945 and the abolition of theatre censorship in 1968. It was a time of social transformation, during

which writers began addressing the problem of what Kenneth Tynan called 'coming to terms with life'. The new institutions that emerged to channel these energies would come to define the landscape of post-War theatre.⁷

3. British Theatre between World War Two and 1956

Using Bourdieu's model as a methodological framework I will try to produce an understanding of the fundamental changes conditioned by the logics and dynamics at work in the field of London theatre from the late fifties into the early seventies. To do that, it is crucial to place the field of theatrical production in its historic context and to understand the structure and history of the field before the "revolution" of 1956.⁸ Only these previous structural conditions made such fundamental changes both necessary and possible.

3.1. The Field of London Theatre before 1956

After the Second World War was ended in 1945, it was an enormous surprise that Labour defeated Winston Churchill and the Conservatives in the General Election of that year. Clement Attlee set about the creation of the Welfare State under the slogan of "Let us face the future". In the ensuing six years of Labour government new structures for health, welfare, education and housing emerged. Decolonisation progressed and the economy recovered from the war. However, some argue that "Britain failed to confront its diminished world status" and that old class systems were left more or less intact (cf. Billington 2007: 6). Billington argues that post-war Britain was clearly divided between "those anxious to return to pre-war values and those who believed in change and progress" (2007: 8), and this division was also reflected in the theatre. Those who

⁷ Abstract from the British Library exhibition *The Golden Generation – British Theatre 1945-68*, 27 August – 30 November 2008, The Folio Society Gallery at the British Library.

⁸ See also: Billington, Michael. *State of the Nation: British Theatre since 1945*. London: Faber and Faber, 2007; Shellard, Dominic. *British Theatre Since The War*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1999; Elsom, John. *Post-War British Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1976; Eyre, Richard, and Nicholas Wright. *Changing Stages: A View of British Theatre in the Twentieth Century*. London: Bloomsbury, 2000; Thomsen, Christian W. *Das Englische Theater der Gegenwart*. Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1980; Innes, Christopher. *Modern British Drama 1890-1990*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge UP, 1992; Duff, Charles. *The Lost Summer: The Heyday of the West End Theatre*. London: Nick Hern, 1995; Kershaw, Baz (Ed.). *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*. Vol. 3: Since 1895. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004; Lacey, Stephen. *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965*. London: Routledge, 1995; Rebellato, Dan. *1956 And All That: The Making of Modern British Drama*. London: Routledge, 1999; Styan, J.L. *The English Stage: A History of Drama and Performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996.

perceived the chance and wanted to create a new kind of theatre in the immediate post war years saw themselves opposed to a large public with certain expectations and ideals what theatre should be like, and what it had been like before and during the war, described by Peter Brook under *holy theatre* his most famous book *The Empty Space*:

[D]uring the war the romantic theatre, the theatre of colours and sounds, of music and movement, came like water to the thirst of dry lives [...] When the war was over, the theatre again strove even more vigorously to find the same values. The theatre of the late '40s had many glories: it was the theatre of Jouvet and Bérard, [...] of Clavé at the ballet, *Don Juan*, *Amphitryon*, *La Folle de Chaillot*, *Carmen*, John Gielgud's revival of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Peer Gynt* at the Old Vic, Olivier's *Oedipus*, Olivier's *Richard III*, *The Lady's not for Burning*, *Venus Observed*; [...] – this was the theatre of colour and movement, of fine fabrics, of shadows, of eccentric, cascading words, of leaps of thought and of cunning machines, of lightness and of all forms of mystery and surprise – it was the theatre of a battered Europe that seemed to share one aim – a reaching back towards a memory of lost grace. (Brook 43)

Brook does not describe a theatre of poor quality. In fact, the 1944-1946 Old Vic season at the New Theatre, run by the triumvirate of Ralph Richardson, Laurence Olivier and John Burrell, is often regarded as “one of the high-water marks of modern British theatre” (Billington 2007: 9). However, a state of dissatisfaction with the returning pre-war values soon aroused in some, primarily young practitioners of the theatre. Peter Hall confirmed that “the British theatre was fairly impoverished from its war experiences, trying to meet a demand from the public which wanted more and more decoration, and more and more beauty, and more and more ‘We’re having a party’”⁹ rather than showing a greater interest in new, experimental forms of theatre and, especially, in new writing. Findlater (1981: 11) also calls it the “theatre of comfort”, “theatre of nostalgia” and “the theatre of classical revivalism” which was served by stars in glamorous costumes. The powerful institutional framework to meet this demand had been established decades earlier and was not to be challenged anytime soon in the immediate post-war years. The struggles over institutional power, however, determined the developments of the 1950s and eventually led to a complete reorganisation of the field.

⁹ Sir Peter Hall, in an interview with the author, 10 November 2009. Henceforward referred to as Hall 2009.

3.1.1. The Actor Manager and the Star System

Before the *annus mirabilis*¹⁰ of 1956, the London theatre scene had been dominated by commercial theatre ventures for over a hundred years. Commercial theatre is “the theatre in which neither the owners of the buildings nor the managements which hire them for their productions receive any form of subsidy, but are entirely dependent upon their judgement of public taste for economic survival, let alone the making of a profit” (Lambert 49-50). From 1660 until 1843, only two theatres in London had the Royal Patent to perform spoken drama, Drury Lane and Covent Garden. All others were obliged “to turn straight plays into operettas, adding mime and music, however irrelevant” (Hinchliffe 172). The monopoly of the patent houses was finally ended when the Theatre Regulation Act was passed in 1843. As a result, the number of playhouses in London increased rapidly. By 1850, there were more than twenty theatres in the city and over sixty by 1900, more than half of them in the West End (cf. Styan 304).

The roots for the commercial theatre structure of post-war Britain are to be found in that period. The theatre of the Victorian age was not primarily about plays but dominated by a star cult and saw the rise of the actor manager. At the very centre of any performance was a star actor who quickly acquired the power and authority to choose the plays which were put on and to determine the way in which they were performed. Actors became the central figures of the theatrical system. They were the leaders and greatest capital of any company and “individual actor-managers and entrepreneurs gained an ever-tighter grip on [the] whole business of play-writing, acting and production” (Styan 309, cf. Smart 10). The star system did begin to fade during the First World War, but even after World War Two, the status of the actor was still very high. A star in the production almost by definition guaranteed commercial success and assisted the easy marketing of plays. Up to the mid-fifties, the actor was symbolically leading theatrical production and his pre-eminence was unquestioned (cf. Rebellato 73). “The concept of the ‘director’ [...] as a functionary separate from the actors or playwright was unknown in Britain until after 1900” (Kershaw 2004: 6). Despite developments outside London and despite the efforts of Edward Gordon Craig and Harley Granville-Barker at the

¹⁰ Cf. Hinchliffe 45.

beginning of the century, the actor's status as central figure of theatrical production was not seriously challenged until the 1950s with the rise of the director or 'producer', as he was called. In the late forties, actors were still rated above directors and even above dramatists. Consequently, such "stars had become [the] sole focus of attraction for audiences who would disregard the plays in which these gigantic presences had inadvertently found themselves" (Rebellato 79). Kenneth Tynan also states that this very system was the reason that there was no interest in new plays in the immediate post-war years. In a system which "harks back to the days of the actor-managers, when you went to the Lyceum to see Irving¹¹ without caring very much what you were going to see him in" (Tynan 1964: 340), there would simply be no demand for modern, innovative playwriting and, necessarily, no supply of it. John Elsom also agrees that the theatre after the Second World War still depended heavily upon star performances. However, he notes that "this very dependence led to some curious, anti-star consequences" (Elsom 1976: 34). Ahead of everyone else it was such powerful individuals as Olivier, Redgrave and Gielgud who became fed up with the trivial and "frivolous" parts they were asked to play and with the "uneven quality of the productions". As early as the late forties, star actors wanted to be part of a team of peers and therefore strove for permanent companies (cf. Elsom 1976: 34). The time for such companies, however, had not yet come. The structure of the field did not allow it then.

3.1.2. The Commercial Nature of the West End

The commercial structure of the immediate post-war years was based upon "a spiral of rising costs which could be neither deferred nor passed directly onto the consumer" and thus conspired to make "theatre a precarious commercial venture" (Lacey 40). Besides the disproportionate rise in the costs of basic materials there was an increase in the need for a publicity budget. Furthermore, the unionisation of actors led to the granting of a minimum wage (cf. Lacey 40). This situation produced "an unprecedented concentration of all the functions of production and distribution in a few hands [...] with a consequent narrowing of the range of plays on offer [...] to those that were tried and tested" (Lacey 41). Managers dedicated themselves to light entertainment and strove for long runs.

¹¹ Sir Henry Irving, the first actor in history to be knighted in 1895.

In an economically difficult situation after the war, they played safe with musicals, farces, thrillers, light comedies, pre-tested Broadway successes and French adaptations. “Idealistic ventures” (cf. Findlater 1981: 12) such as minority clubs and play-producing societies had helped for a long time to keep theatre alive but were severely suffering under economic pressure. “Under a dog-eat-dog capitalistic system, powerful companies increased in strength, weaker ones went to the wall, until finally a small group of owners dominated the profession, controlling the people, the places and the expressivity of the medium alike” (Elsom 1976: 13). Prior to the advent of state subsidy, the London theatre scene had therefore been controlled by entrepreneurs whose interest was primarily financial rather than artistic. Large sections of the London theatre fell into the hands of very few, very powerful people. During the war, the Prince Littler Consolidated Trust, for instance, bought up bankrupt theatres at the lowest cost and by the end of the 1940s they controlled over 50 per cent of all the seats in the West End and owned 70 per cent of the main touring theatres¹². The financial arrangements of the West End in the late forties and the business networks were extraordinarily complicated. The most powerful consortium of business interests was popularly known as *The Group*. It owned the majority of theatres and managed a small number of producing companies, the foremost being H.M. Tennent Ltd. with its now legendary managing director Hugh ‘Binkie’ Beaumont (cf. Kershaw 2004: 296). Beaumont¹³ had staged 59 plays during the 6 years of war and, on VE Day, 8 May 1945, “was responsible for 12 ‘Tennent’ productions in 8 of the 36 West End theatres” (Shellard 1999: 7, cf. Huggett 323). Beaumont was an “austere self-contained man, a literary purist and confident of his judgments” (Elsom 1976: 14). His business followed a fairly simple but very effective recipe for success: “the greatest stars in gorgeous classic revivals amidst the most sumptuous settings which taste and money could devise” (Huggett 325). Beaumont quickly advanced to become the most powerful man of post-war British theatre.

‘Tennent’s’ was a byword for star-studded, impeccably mounted, middlebrow theatre. Its power was absolute. No writer, director, designer or actor could earn much of a living in London without Binkie’s approval and those who displeased him were out in the cold till death. (Theirs or

¹² See also Elsom 1976: 12ff, Kershaw 2004: 379 and Rebellato 54

¹³ Hugh Beaumont was born in 1908 and died in 1973. He is often referred to as *Eminence Grise of the West End Theatre* (cf. Huggett 1989).

his.) His diplomatic skills were legendary. He imposed his taste on everything he produced [...]. (Eyre, and Wright 120)

In 1916, as an emergency measure to help the war effort, an entertainment tax had been introduced. By the time of the Second World War, it had risen to one third of the box-office income (cf. Eyre, and Wright 120). Beaumont spotted a loophole in the Finance Act of 1916, namely that educational activities were excluded from taxation, and founded a second, non-profit distributing company, Tennent Plays Ltd. Under the banner of presenting “educational” plays, he encouraged classical revivals and some plays by new dramatists (cf. Elsom 1976: 14). Tennent Plays Ltd’s exemption from entertainment tax was one of the determinants of post-war British theatre that gave Beaumont a virtual monopoly of the West End through the operations of his non profit-making companies. The *Theatrical Companies Bill* of 1954 sought to redefine the way in which such companies were to be run and was certainly intended to break Beaumont’s monopoly. Beaumont fought for the tax with all powers until it was repealed in 1957, a year that marked the beginning of the end for H.M. Tennents’ dominating position in the field. “Tennents were to remain a force to be reckoned with for another twenty years, but never again was one man to have both such artistic influence and such managerial power over the entire British Theatre” (Duff 105). The significance of Beaumont’s character as a “key figure in the restoration of the West End’s pre-war glory” was that he “strove to keep a well-shod foot in both the Idealist and Pragmatist camps while ultimately embodying a conservative aesthetic [sic!] and fighting tenaciously to sustain the dominance of commercial theatre”.¹⁴

3.1.3. The Lord Chamberlain

*The censorship is ridiculous and infamous.
It is a betrayal of liberty.*¹⁵

– John Osborne –

Besides the commercial structure of the theatre there was yet another relict from the past which fundamentally influenced the development of new writing

¹⁴ Billington 2007: 32. See Billington 2007: 32-35 for a detailed discussion of Beaumont’s skill to play the system to his advantage. Billington describes how Beaumont “was responsible for many of the best West End productions of the Forties, played an astute political game and backed talent” (32), how he ran an “empire-building commercial organization under the cloak of Arts Council endorsement and ‘educational’ aspiration” (34), and how “Beaumont, while flirting with the Idealists, was at heart a theatrical Pragmatist” (35).

¹⁵ John Osborne in the *Evening Standard* on 25 October 1956. Qtd. in Osborne 1994: 162.

and new forms of theatre in the mid-20th century: The Lord Chamberlain¹⁶. Stage censorship dated back to the reign of Henry VII¹⁷ and was formally settled by the *Walpole's Licensing Act* of 1737. The Lord Chamberlain was an official of the royal household and charged with pre-censoring any play which was to be performed on a British stage. Plays had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's office prior to the first night and were then read by several officers who granted or refused a license for performance. Even though the rules were never stated categorically, the censors wouldn't allow "blasphemy, obscenity or representation of living persons on the stage" (Jellicoe *The Unkindest Cuts of All* 25). In the mid-20th century, the Lord Chamberlain was particularly sensitive about references to living politicians or royalty, vulgarism, nudity, and homosexuality.¹⁸ The penalties could be severe if the censor's requests for cuts were ignored. Not only could he close down the theatre by taking away its license, but anyone involved in a production could even be prosecuted and fined. The fight against stage censorship dominated much of the theatre in the fifties and sixties. Playwrights and the theatres who wanted to stage their work became increasingly aggressive towards the Lord Chamberlain until 28 September 1968, when the *Theatres Act* finally ended its long reign over drama in its power to pre-censor plays. By then, the Lord Chamberlain had already lost much of its original force (cf. Elsom 1976: 199). Not only had the censors become more liberal in outlook by the sixties, there had also been several ways around direct censorship for many years:

The theatre club system had developed during the 1950s and early 1960s, to exploit that shadowy area of the law where two principles overlapped – the preservation of public decency and the protection of home privacy. Clubs were regarded as private property, whereas the theatres were public premises. Provided that the clubs were not run as brothels and that they were genuine 'membership' clubs, almost any theatrical display could be presented in them. (Elsom 1976: 199-200)

Or, as Peter Hall puts it: "Providing you joined a theatre club, you could have your morals corrupted – and be burnt to death, for clubs were also outside the official fire regulations" (1993: 98). The theatre clubs were the first proof that,

¹⁶ See also Shellard 1999: 8-14.

¹⁷ Cf. Jellicoe, Ann. "The Unkindest Cuts of All". *Encore Magazine* 38, 9.4 (July-Aug.1962). 24-27.

¹⁸ Cf. Andrews, Jamie. "The Golden Generation – Introduction." *British Library Podcast*. Recorded on 8 September 2008. Retrieved on 20 November 2008 <<http://www.bl.uk/whatson/podcasts/exhibition/golden/index.html>>.

slowly but steadily, a new kind of audience was growing that showed interest in plays a little out of the ordinary. The theatre clubs' "registered membership provided audience potential [...] that was willing to accept more in the ways of plays and less in the way of theatre décor" (Hinchliffe 56). The battle with the Lord Chamberlain was one of the two major struggles which the three institutions discussed in this paper – the Royal Court, the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company – had to face in the 1950s and 1960s. The other was that over state subsidy.

3.1.4. State Subsidy

With its two patent theatres at first and the commercial structure of the theatre after, Great Britain had never had a tradition of supporting the arts with money from the public hand. In most other European countries, theatre at court was supported by the gentry until, sooner or later, that role was overtaken by federal or local sponsorship. The British government had never offered subsidy to support the arts before 1939. "[T]he value of the arts in maintaining national morale had been quickly recognised" at the beginning of the Second World War (Shellard 1999: 6).¹⁹ To maintain cultural activities during the war, a Council for the Encouragement of Music and Art (CEMA) was convened in 1940 with its main emphases on amateur activity, touring and regionalism. Over the first decade of its existence, these interests shifted, as Rebellato points out, towards their precise opposites: "professionalism, buildings and London" (41). When the war was ended in 1945, financial support to the arts from the government, as it had existed in other European countries for over two centuries, was suddenly considered not to be such a bad idea after all. The Arts Council of Great Britain²⁰ was established in 1946 (cf. Lacey 42) as the replacement of the CEMA and to maintain subsidy after the war. State aid to the arts had finally been firmly established in the field. It eventually provoked a fundamental re-organisation of the London theatre landscape and, necessarily, a re-orientation of cultural policy. The Arts Council was assigned the task "to develop a greater

¹⁹ Lee argues that the concept of state subsidy was based on a civilising discourse of the arts: "Taking the non-profit organisational form, the theatre could present itself as an 'educational' and 'artistic' endeavour, which was distinguished from popular, commercial entertainment. In a sense, a new breed of theatre with the management structures and operational goals appropriate for pursuing its civilising mission finally developed with state subsidy" (296).

²⁰ See also: White, Eric Walter. *The Arts Council of Great Britain*. London: Davis-Poynter, 1975; Elsom, John. *Post-War British Theatre*. London: Routledge, 1976. 126-140. Elsom also goes into detail about the "ideological battle" surrounding the concept of subsidy (cf. 1976: 16-17).

knowledge, understanding and practice of the Fine Arts, to increase their accessibility to the public and to improve their standard of execution" (*Royal Charter* qtd. in Thomsen 97). The arts in Britain, then, were not controlled by a ministry as, for example, in Austria or France. The Art's Council is an independent body which is only financed by the government and thus a sort of autonomous, non-governmental organisation. The money it receives from the government is given to various non-profit-distributing organisations in the arts. The Council was formed not only to allocate the money as equitably as possible but also to act as a buffer between the arts and the government. The system "was devised so as to ensure the minimum of interference, political or otherwise, with the recipients of subsidy" (Lambert 11). The Arts Council is not a promoting body, which means it does not establish theatre companies but only responds to local initiative and enthusiasm. It does not play any part in running or managing the companies it supports. The Council offers advice if asked but otherwise expects the companies to act freely and independently upon the money they receive (cf. Lambert 12). The Arts Council, therefore, appears to be independent from both the government and artistic institutions as it doesn't itself make artistic decisions but rather gives financial support to the decisions made by institutions and artists.

The initiation of subsidy²¹ to support to the arts crucially influenced the development of the theatrical field after the Second World War. In particular, institutions like the Royal Shakespeare Company or the National Theatre could not have been founded and run without financial aid from the treasury. As subsidy was a new concept to British theatre in the twentieth century, it took time for the Arts Council to grow, develop and really prove its purpose to the arts. Basically, that had to do with the amount of money distributed to theatrical enterprises.

In 1950 the money available to the Drama Department amounted to £95,000, divided between just over a dozen companies. In 1973 the sum was nearly £2.5 million – approximately one-sixth of the Council's total grant – which does not include further sums allotted to touring, education

²¹ Grants from the Arts Council were the major but not the only form of subsidy available to theatrical enterprises. There was, for instance, also the chance to receive grants from local councils or, of course, private donations. Nevertheless, subsidies in the British theatre have always only covered a relatively small part of a company's overall costs. Even heavily subsidised institutions are still largely dependent on box-office income (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 1-5).

in the arts and other projects, and the very substantial sums (by British standards) allotted to what are known as the national companies, in the case of Drama the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company. (Lambert 11-12)

The lack of state funding in Great Britain before the war has been regarded “as being responsible for an anomalous relationship between theatre devoted to the development of drama and the dramatic text, and theatre that operated as a commercial enterprise” (Kershaw 2004: 147). Even in the early years of the Arts Council’s existence, it neither had “the will nor the resources to effect radical changes within the cultural professions”. For the time being, the economics of the theatre stayed in its “parlous condition” (cf. Lacey 43) under commercial managements. However, the situation improved gradually as the grants from the government rose steadily. The Arts Council’s influence on the structure of the field finally proved to be enormous and eventually led to proliferation and diversity. “Virtually all of the most significant and influential theatre of the post-war period had been produced with the aid of public subsidy” (Kershaw 2004: 428).

Heavily subsidised institutions like the National Theatres of France or Austria had never existed in Great Britain before the 1960s. Bourdieu regards “the great subsidized theatres”²² (1996: 161) as standing in grave opposition to the ‘bourgeois’ theatres’ on the autonomous pole of cultural production: “enterprises which are economically and culturally risky and which offer, at relatively low prices, plays that break with conventions [...] and are destined for a young and ‘intellectual’ audience [...].” However, even though the structure of the artistic field is determined by the two antagonistic positions of *restricted* and *large scale* production, Bourdieu acknowledges that there are a number of cultural practices in between the extreme autonomous and heteronomous poles of the field which combine the two principles of legitimacy, namely the great classical institutions.²³

²² Like the Odéon, the Théâtre de l’Est Parisien and the Théâtre National Populaire in Paris

²³ The great *classical* theatres in France like the Comédie-Française or the Atelier, for instance, “constitute neutral places [between the two poles of production] which draw their audiences almost equally from all regions of the field of power and which offer neutral or eclectic programmes, ‘the avant-garde boulevard’ (in the words of a critic of *La Croix*) or consecrated avant-garde” (Bourdieu 1996: 162). In Great Britain, however, the two national institutions which are now heavily subsidised and regarded as “classical” were only mounted in the early years of the 1960s. Especially the RSC was first established in a position very close to the autonomous pole of production. Their gradual movement towards a more neutral position in the field,

3.2. The Movement towards a National Theatre

One of the major achievements of post-war British theatre made possible, amongst other things, by state subsidy was the establishment of, not one, but two national theatres. For centuries, government money in Great Britain had been used for trade and expansion of the empire, for another kind of national prestige, therefore, but certainly not for the arts²⁴. In other European countries, two or even three centuries before Great Britain, national theatres were set up on the order of their absolute monarchs. The crown in England never seemed to show much interest in such an institution, not until the government finally made money available for the establishment of a National Theatre the mid-20th century. In 1910, Bernhard Shaw mocked this fact in *The Dark Lady of the Sonnets*:

QUEEN ELIZABETH I. Your tables begin to anger me, sir. I am not here to write your plays for you.

SHAKESPEARE. You are here to inspire them, madam. For this, among the rest, were you ordained. But the boon I crave is that you do endow a great playhouse or, if I may make bold to coin a scholarly name for it, a National Theatre, for the better instruction and gracing of your Majesty's subjects.

QUEEN ELIZABETH I. Why, sir, are there not theatres enow on Bankside and in Blackfriars?

SHAKESPEARE. Madam: these are the adventures of needy and desperate men that must, to save themselves from perishing of want, give the sillier sort of people what they best like; and what they best like, God knows, is not their own betterment and instruction. [...] Wherefore I humbly beg your Majesty to give order that a theatre be endowed out of the public revenue for the playing of those pieces of mine which no

comparable to that of the classical theatres in France, will be exemplified in this paper on the basis of the RSC's and the National's development throughout the sixties and seventies.

²⁴ Compare Becker (1982) on the role of the state in the process of artistic production: "The state acts because it has interests of its own. [These could be, for example] the development of a national culture, seen as a good in itself and as something which promotes national unity ('our heritage') and the nation's reputation among other nations. The state pursues its interests by giving or withholding the forms of support artists need and depend on which the state can influence" (180). "[T]he state participates in the network of cooperation, the art world, which produces the works characteristic of a particular medium at a particular time. It creates the framework of property rights within which artists get economic support and make reputations. [...] It gives open support to some forms of art, and to some practitioners of those forms, when they appear to further national purposes. It uses state power to suppress work which seems likely to mobilize citizens for disapproved activities or prevent them from being mobilized for appropriate purposes. The state thus acts like other art world participants, providing opportunities to get art work done by giving support both directly and indirectly for what it approves of, and acting as a constraint on other activities by preventing access, for works deemed unsatisfactory, to some of the facilities ordinarily available to all participants. Thus, the state may prevent works from being distributed (the most usual form of intervention) [...]" (191).

merchant will touch, seeing that his gain is so much greater with the worse than with the better. Thereby you shall also encourage other men to undertake the writing of plays who do now despise it and leave it wholly to those whose counsels will work little good to your realm. For this writing of plays is a great matter, forming as it does the minds and affections of men in such sort that whatsoever they see done in show on the stage, they will presently be doing in earnest in the world, which is but a large stage. [...]

QUEEN ELIZABETH I. Master Shakespeare, I will speak of this matter to the Lord Treasurer.

SHAKESPEARE. Then am I undone, madam; for there never was yet a Lord Treasurer that could find a penny for anything over and above the necessary expenses of your government, save for a war or a salary for his own nephew. (1932: 241-243)

Theatre practitioners themselves did not stay ignorant of the idea, of course, but failed to actually convince the crown and establish such an institution until as late as 1963. The idea of a national theatre company²⁵ in Great Britain goes back to David Garrick's 'Shakespeare Jubilee' in Stratford in 1769. Garrick, not only the most famous actor of his time but also manager, director and dramatist was one of the first true *men of the theatre*. He was dreaming of a national theatre company under the patronage of the crown in the great tradition of the *Comédie Française*, which had already been established almost a century earlier in 1680. In the 19th century, several agents pursued the idea of a national theatre. In 1848, Effingham Wilson made the first serious proposal for a National Theatre supported by the government where the works of Shakespeare could be performed for anyone at low prices. However, no practical steps were taken. Henry Irving pronounced the desirability and possibility of a national theatre when he gave a paper on the subject at a social science congress in 1878. He set out to find "an ideal standard somewhat above the average of contemporary taste" (qtd. in Roose-Evans 146) and attempted to turn the Lyceum Theatre into a quasi national theatre by putting on a mixture of modern and classical plays with a large cast and top stars. In 1880, Matthew Arnold published an essay on the subject which provided a catchy slogan for later campaigners: "The theatre is irresistible: organise the theatre!"²⁶

²⁵ See also: Roose-Evans, James. *London Theatre: From the Globe to the National*. Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1977. 145-151; Findlater, Richard. "The Road to King's Reach". 1977. *National Theatre Homepage*. 6 May 2009 <<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=9149>>; Goodwin, Tim. *Britain's Royal National Theatre: The first 25 years*. London: NT and Nick Hern, 1988.

²⁶ Arnold, Matthew: "We have in England everything to make us dissatisfied with the chaotic and ineffective condition into which our theatre has fallen. We have the remembrance of better things in the past, and the elements for better things in the future. We have a splendid national

Closest to the actual realisation of a national theatre came William Archer and Harley Granville Barker when they published a document in 1904 which proposed such an institution in practical detail: *A National Theatre: Scheme and Estimates*²⁷. The fact that it took yet another sixty years, almost, for a National Theatre Company to be set up and over seventy for a National Theatre to be built was to a great extent due to the two World Wars. The three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's death in 1916 would have been an ideal moment to open the doors of the National Theatre and this would almost certainly have happened if the war had not broken out in 1914. By 1938 a site had then finally been agreed upon opposite the Victoria and Albert Museum and very considerable funds were accumulated to launch the theatre. Yet again, however, Great Britain went to war and the National Theatre had to wait. Findlater notes that the Second World War had "a decisive effect on the fortunes of the National Theatre campaign. By the time that the peace was signed its aim appeared, for the first time, to have become practical politics" (cf. 1977: paragraphs 8-9). Findlater states three reasons for this fact: state aid for the arts had finally been introduced²⁸; a new site for the National Theatre building had been found near Waterloo Bridge and offered by the London County Council in order to develop the South Bank of the Thames after the war; and finally, an association with an existing theatre company, the Old Vic, which could provide the "nucleus of a national theatre company" (cf. Roose-Evans 148) once the building had been erected seemed possible and very appealing.

drama of the Elizabethan age, and a later drama which has no lack of pieces conspicuous by their stage qualities, their vivacity and their talent, and interesting by their pictures of manners. We have had great actors. We have good actors not a few at the present moment. But we have been unlucky, as we so often are, in the work of organisation... It seems to me that every one of us is concerned to find a remedy for this melancholy state of things, and that the pleasure we have had in the visit of the French company [the Comédie Française] is barren, unless it leaves us with the impulse to do so, and with the lesson how alone it can be rationally done. "Forget" – can we not hear these fine artists saying in an undertone to us, amidst their graceful compliments of adieu? – "forget your clap-trap, and believe that the State, the nation in its collective and corporate character, does well to concern itself about an influence so important to national life and manners as the theatre. ... The people will have the theatre; then make it a good one. ... The theatre is irresistible; organise the theatre!" qtd. in Archer, William, and H. Granville Barker. *A National Theatre: Scheme & Estimates*. London: Duckworth, 1907.

²⁷ Archer, William, and H. Granville Barker. *A National Theatre: Scheme & Estimates*. London: Duckworth, 1907. The book was published privately in 1904 and issued to the general public in 1907.

²⁸ Archer and Granville Barker had considered it "a waste of time" to look to Parliament for funds" (Findlater 1977, paragraph 9).

In the mid 1940s, the Old Vic Company was run by a triumvirate of Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson and John Burrell. They staged a series of legendary productions and, once again, it appeared as if Great Britain was close to a de facto national theatre company. Billington states that the Old Vic looked like a “model organization” for a national theatre: “While the parent company fulfilled its national responsibility, satellite groups carried out the vital business of training, research and development” (2007: 12). In 1949, the National Theatre Bill was passed in the Houses of Parliament and the “Government of the time was empowered to vote up to a million pounds towards the cost of a building and equipment” (Lambert 13). However, the whole scheme collapsed due to “a complicated mixture of factors: the natural ambitions of the key actors, the British belief that administrators are more trustworthy than mere artists and the lack of any coherent financial structure to underpin the grand plan” (Billington 2007: 12). Olivier and Richardson were just the right kind of company leaders a scheme like the National Theatre would have needed to be realised in the theatrical field of that time. However, when their contracts as directors of the Old Vic Company were not renewed in 1949 (see Billington 2007: 13), British theatre was once again doomed to wait for its representative institution. The logics of the field would not allow just anyone to make the National Theatre come true. And as the opportunity was missed in 1949, Olivier had to wait until 1963 when the next chance finally came about.

3.3. Conclusion – Historic Context

One must not underestimate the influence of the political²⁹ and economic developments of the time on the field of theatrical production. Such external determinants certainly conditioned much of the changes which occurred in the field after the Second World War. The dimensions of this diploma thesis which puts its emphasis on field-internal developments only allow looking at these influences to some extent. However, it is one of the strengths of Bourdieu’s

²⁹ Three consecutive Conservative administrations from 1951 to 1964 brought a time of unprecedented social stability and material prosperity (Winston Churchill 1951-1955; Anthony Eden 1955-1957; Harold Macmillan 1957-1963). Harold Macmillan, in his famous speech in 1957, expressed that “most of our people have never had it so good”. After 1964, the two Labour governments led by Harold Wilson (1964-1970 and 1974-1976) and James Callaghan (1976-1979) failed to deliver the profound social change they promised and that political dramatists hoped for. Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979. Under her leadership, the Conservative Party ruled Britain throughout the 1980s. For a table of significant events see Shellard 1999: x-ixx.

model to regard field-external determinants as part of the internal structure and conditions. Political and economic sanctions are translated into the logics of the field and therefore act as if they were innate to the rules of the game.

This autonomous social universe [i.e. the field] functions somewhat like a prism which *refracts* every external determination: demographic, economic or political events are always retranslated according to the specific logic of the field, and it is by this intermediary that they act on the logic of the development of works. (Bourdieu 1986a: 164)

This is especially true for the concept of state subsidy and censorship through the Lord Chamberlain. These are certainly the two most significant external determinants which proved to have the greatest, and most direct, influence on the development of theatrical works and institutions of the time. Both the Lord Chamberlain and the concept of subsidy show that the artistic field is contained within the larger field of power and that it only possesses a relative autonomy from it. External determinants, once refracted into the specific logic of the field, necessarily condition the internal struggles:

Internal struggles are to an extent arbitrated by external sanctions. In effect, even if they are largely independent *in their principle* (meaning in the causes and reasons determining them), the clashes which unfold inside the literary (etc.) field always depend, *in their outcome*, happy or unhappy, on the correspondence they have with external clashes [...] and the support that one group or another may find there. (Bourdieu 1996: 252)

After all, none of the great theatrical institutions of the sixties could have been established without the advent of state subsidy. There would have been no *Anger* without a political and social situation to be upset with and much of the writing would have looked very differently if it wasn't especially written to push the boundaries of stage censorship. The larger field of power pre-conditions a sub-field of artistic production to exist. Fields of cultural production necessarily build upon external sanctions but constantly strive for autonomy and independence from them, especially in terms of political and economic principles of hierarchisation.

In the immediate post-war years, a dominance of the heteronomous principle of legitimisation and production heavily undermined the logic of a supposedly artistic field which is grounded upon an inverted economy of symbolic goods³⁰.

³⁰ Compare again: "These [artistic] fields are the site of the antagonistic coexistence of two modes of production and circulation obeying inverse logics. At one pole, there is the anti-

The dominance of the heteronomous pole of large-scale production was so strong in the commercial structure of the West End that autonomous, idealistic ventures could hardly exist. Artistic legitimacy and the autonomy of the arts are based upon the accumulation of symbolic capital, but they weren't at that time. The West End theatre sacrificed much of its autonomy to the logics of economic profit maximisation. The subfield of large-scale production, which is truly "dedicated and devoted to the market and profit" (Bourdieu, 1996: 220), had absolute control over the whole field. The two modes of production and circulation did not coexist on equal terms. The sub-field of restricted production was not even allowed symbolic dominance. Theatre was business, and potentially threatening alternatives were immediately suppressed by those in power.

Furthermore, the West End bowed to external demands from the audience and, for a long time, ignored the field-internal developments in its quest for autonomy and to renew itself. The *illusio* of the theatrical game was flawed. The West End "committed the ultimate sin of following, not leading, taste" (Styan 396). Even though Beaumont exercised a "monopoly of taste" (Osborne 1994: 8), he didn't use it to create an audience and a true market for new works but he followed the existing demand for "quilted escapism and bourgeois refinement" (Billington 2007: 5). In search to return to pre-war values, the writing of plays followed pre-established forms and was "constricted by an unthinking dependence upon the 'naturalistic well-made play' formulae"³¹, popularized by Ibsen, Shaw, Rattigan and others" (Elsom 1976: 6). To Bourdieu, this fact is a major indicator of the position in the field: "An enterprise moves closer to the 'commercial' pole the more directly or completely the products it offers on the market respond to a *pre-existing demand*, and in *pre-established forms*" (1996: 142). The West End

'economic' economy of pure art. Founded on the obligatory recognition of the values of disinterestedness and on the denegation of the 'economy' (of the 'commercial') and of 'economic' profit (in the short term), it privileges production and its specific necessities, the outcome of an autonomous history. This production, which can acknowledge no other demand than one it can generate itself, but only in the long term, is oriented to the accumulation of symbolic capital [...]. At the other pole, there is the 'economic' logic of the literary and artistic industries which, since they make the trade in cultural goods just another trade, confer priority on distribution, on immediate and temporary success, measured for example by the print run, and which are content to adjust themselves to the pre-existing demand of a clientele" (Bourdieu 1996: 142).

³¹ The three key features of the 'well-made play' are the Crisis, the Hero and the Unities of Time, Place and Action (cf. Elsom 1976: 37).

theatres therefore show a great similarity to those 'bourgeois' theatres" described in *The Rules of Art*:

[O]rdinary commercial enterprises obliged by a concern for economic profitability to follow cultural strategies of an extreme prudence, avoiding risks and not making their clients take them. They offer spectacles that have proved themselves or that are destined for safe and certain box office receipts, to an older, 'bourgeois' audience [...] ready to pay high seat prices to attend shows of simple entertainment which obey [...] the canons of an aesthetic unchanged for a century. (Bourdieu 1996: 161-162)

The point is that the theatre of post-war London need not, necessarily, have been in an artistically impoverished state to frustrate a new generation of theatre practitioners. Even when it provided high quality theatre with the greatest actors in the greatest classics, it simply didn't represent what theatre *could* be, namely an innovative, living art form. Osborne describes that theatre was reduced to being

a form of entertainment largely provided by and for a narrow, self-absorbed public, incapable of imagination or excitement. For many years the London theatrical managers slavishly cultivated this boring public. As a result, the theatre came to be regarded as a mild, middle-class pursuit, and its scope, ancient and modern, preserved for ever in the first line of its hymnal, 'Anyone for tennis?' (1994: 7)

The theatre of the late forties and early fifties, however, was certainly not "all French-windowed irrelevance" (Billington 2007: 19) or a theatrical wasteland, as often claimed, but really "laid the blueprint for later 20th century theatre"³².

Idealistic ventures, of which some existed, merely saw themselves opposed to a strong commercial dominance in the field and an unhealthy concentration of power in the hands of a few impresarios – which had to be overcome. And therefore, in its constant need to renew itself, the field allowed these seeds to grow, slowly but steadily. What they still lacked in the late forties and early fifties was the pragmatism to institutionalise their undertakings and secure their firm position in the field. Over the next twenty years, the field successfully moved towards more autonomy from economic principles of hierarchisation. That was to a great part due to the struggles of cultural agents like George Devine, Kenneth Tynan, Laurence Olivier or Peter Hall, namely their struggles with the censor, their struggles over subsidy and their encouragement of works outside

³² Andrews, Jamie. "The Golden Generation – Introduction." *British Library Podcast*. Recorded on 8 September 2008. Retrieved on 20 November 2008
<<http://www.bl.uk/whatson/podcasts/exhibition/golden/index.html>>. See also: Shellard 2008: 8.

the established canon. “A rising generation of actors, producers and writers felt the need to use theatre to come to grips with the realities of life in the 1950s, a need echoed in those who were just beginning to go to the theatre” (Hinchliffe 189). The theatrical field of the late fifties and early sixties finally offered them the possibilities to fulfil this need.

3.4. The Field of Possibles in the Mid-Fifties

The possibilities to make a change for the emerging new generation of British theatre practitioners was clearly defined by the strong internal needs of the field to renew its structure and to overcome the outworn modes of production and the kinds of theatre resulting from them. New works of art, artists and institutions define themselves in relation to the “*space of possibles*” (Bourdieu 1983: 30). It appears helpful to define a broader field of possible action, i.e. defining the structural lacunae in the theatre of the time, before looking at an individual agent’s habitus and possible frame of action in relation to the field. Young theatrical agents like writers, directors or critics started to realise that it was the system itself, rather than a lack of talent, which was responsible for the “poor state” of British drama after the war. All they had to do was to group together and raise their voice for a “vital theatre”³³.

It was clearest that something had to be done about the theatre’s complete commercial reliance upon box-office results, which brought a great number of restrictions in terms of artistic decisions: “timidity in choice of plays, reliance upon stars, an unwillingness to challenge popular prejudices, an attachment to old genres [...] and the habit of prolonging hits endlessly” (Elsom 1976: 89). Therefore, a new kind of theatrical institution outside the commercial structure seemed to be the very pre-condition for any aesthetic movement to take place. Such an institution would allow a different mode of production and necessarily encourage new writing. However, in the late 1940s it was not possible to look to the small and noncommercial “Little Theatres” (cf. Peacock 6) for such alternative modes of production, as the avant-garde usually does, for those were also suffering from financial stringency, falling audiences and the pressure

³³ Cf. Anderson, Lindsay: “Vital Theatre?” In: Marowitz, Charles, Tom Milne and Owen Hale (Eds.). *The Encore Reader: A Chronicle of the New Drama*. London: Methuen, 1965. 41-47.

from the West End³⁴. What the theatre of the time really needed, it was soon agreed upon, was consistency in the form of permanent companies similar to those seen in Germany and Russia under Brecht or Stanislavsky. However, such companies with long rehearsal periods, resident writers and a permanent ensemble playing in repertoire were expensive and, in other countries, could only survive with large subsidies from the state (cf. Elsom 1976: 126). As these barely existed in Britain at the time, such an idea of an expensive company playing in repertoire seemed truly paradox. High costs for a theatrical production necessarily meant either long runs or transfers to other theatres. The British theatre, for centuries, had been dominated by the long run system, which means a play is staged almost daily as long as there is an audience to see it and to guarantee financial profit. On the other hand, if there is little or no audience, a production could be gone by the end of its first week. The repertory system allows “a much more daring approach” (Smart 12) in terms of plays as the theatre is not dependent on and oriented towards the success of one single production. Also, it would give a play much more time to find its audience and, on the other side, it would give an audience more time to get accustomed to the play. Under the long run system, a play used to be “like a lump of raw meat thrown to the critics, to be eaten immediately or declared unfit for human consumption; no time for cooking or seasoning”³⁵. The repertory system was already established successfully once at the Court Theatre under George Bernhard Shaw and Harley Granville Barker at the beginning of the century. However, the concept lost its popularity under the commercial structure of the West End.³⁶

³⁴ This is not to deny the influence of the Arts Theatre which staged the premiere of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* in 1955 and by that, in a different way, paved the road for new developments in the British theatre. See Chapter 5.2.1.

³⁵ “A View from the Gods.” *Encore Magazine* 33, 8.5 (Sept.-Oct.1961). 6.

³⁶ Bourdieu also states that this very difference between a long and short circle of production and consummation indicates a company's orientation in the field: “[T]he length of the production cycle constitutes one of the best measures of the position of an enterprise of cultural production in the field. So one finds, on the one hand, enterprises with a *short production cycle*, aiming to minimize risks by an advance adjustment to predictable demand and benefiting from commercial networks and procedures for marketing (advertising, public relations, etc.) designed to ensure the accelerated return of profits by a rapid circulation of products which are fated to rapid obsolescence; and, on the other hand, enterprises with a *long production cycle*, founded on the acceptance of the risk inherent in cultural investments and above all on submission to the specific laws of the art trade: having no market in the present, this production (entirely turned towards the future) tends to constitute stocks of products which are always in danger of reverting to the state of material objects [...]” (Bourdieu 1996: 142-143).

However, not only the system was archaic but also the drama of the 1950s “was a fossilized remnant of the British realistic well-made play of the late nineteenth century and was quite unaffected by the radical formal innovations that had shaken European drama during the previous half century” (Peacock 2).

Peacock further states that “the craft of playwriting had, for the most part, become stale” (4). Not only had the drama of the time been ignorant of movements throughout Europe, it also ignored Britain’s own society. In a symposium on the state of the British theatre held by *Encore Magazine* at the Royal Court Theatre on 18 November 1956, Arthur Miller stated: “I sense that the British theatre is hermetically sealed against the way the society moves” (see Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 40). The London stage of the early fifties was completely indifferent to contemporary events (cf. Shellard 1999: 33). It was commonly agreed upon that “in the long term something more substantial than revues and farces would be needed to stimulate the post-war theatre going public” (Shellard 1999: 3) and that a new form of theatrical institution, above all, would finally nurse this desperate need for new writing in England. The uninspiring nature of plays produced after the war was still lamented in 1955 (cf. Hinchliffe 46). The need for a new institutional basis for innovative theatre and the need for new writing had grown to the utmost by the mid fifties.

In the very same symposium Arthur Miller vouched for a theatre more aware of the issues of British society, Benn W. Levy argued:

You can’t have an *avant-garde* composed of dramatists only. You’ve got to have an *avant-garde* on the receiving end as well. [...] What we are really suffering from is the loss of a serious little theatre movement, of the kind that proliferates in Paris, and gives opportunities for difficult playwrights to put on difficult plays without involving some management in very serious loss. (see Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 41)

For any new theatre to be established in order to produce modern drama, therefore, it was an equally important task to build up a possible audience. And the public needed to be attracted by means of more stimulating works than those offering safe and easygoing pre-war values. The acknowledgement of the need for an audience, and how to attract it, might not have influenced the establishment of the English Stage Company but it certainly determined its success.

Finally, Great Britain still desperately needed a National Theatre. The advent of state subsidy did seem to make it possible at last. In a letter to Olivier, Kenneth Tynan writes: "Subsidy gives us the chance – denied to movies and TV – of taking a line of our own, with no commercial pressures and without the neutralizing necessity of being 'impartial'" (qtd. in Olivier 263). As mentioned above, the development of the Arts Council as the main apparatus of arts funding grew to become one of the most decisive forces shaping theatre practice in the late 1950s and 60s.

The greatest possibility of the post-war period was that, in the mid-fifties, a great hunger arose in London for some alternative to the West End (cf. Billington 2007: 75). Therefore, in order to achieve more autonomy from commercialism, encourage new writing and attract this new kind of interested audience, British theatre needed to establish new forms of organisation and an institutional basis to redefine the structural order of the field, legitimise new works and make the achievements last³⁷. For that, it needed the right kind of people. Only someone with a fitting habitus and the right amount of symbolic capital, therefore power, to fill the structural gaps could lead the young generation of British theatre in a new direction. Such symbolic leaders had many faces: idealistic impresarios, established actors or young directors. However, they all had something crucial in common: the right position in the field and dispositions to play the game.³⁸

4. (R)Evolution: The ESC at the Royal Court

4.1. Introduction

In the field of British theatre, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court has become to be considered "the most important single institution for the encouragement of the dramatist" (Hinchliffe 57). That image was certainly constructed within the first years of its existence. From 1956 onwards, the ESC

³⁷ Cf. Becker: "Artistic work lasts when it has an organizational basis that preserves and protects it" (1982: 350).

³⁸ Compare again Bourdieu on the subject: "[T]he structural lacunae of a system of possibles which is undoubtedly never given *as such* to the subjective experience of agents [...] cannot be filled by the magic virtue of a sort of tendency of the system to complete itself. The summons contained in these gaps is only understood by those who, as a result of their position in the field and their habitus, and of the [...] relationship between the two, are free enough from the constraints inscribed in the structure to be able to recognize as applying to them a virtuality which, in a sense, only exists for them. This gives their enterprise, after the event, the appearance of predestination" (1996: 239).

fostered most of the major dramatists of the English “renaissance” in the mid-20th century: John Osborne, John Arden, Ann Jellicoe, N.F. Simpson and Arnold Wesker, Edward Bond, Christopher Hampton, Howard Brenton, Joe Orton, among others, and many thereafter. Within months after the company was established it came to be known as the primary “home of new drama in Britain” (Taylor 1966: 120), and that reputation hasn’t altered much over the last fifty years. The history of the Royal Court Theatre, however, is usually accompanied by a “big bang” theory (Shellard 2008: 7) surrounding the premiere of John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* on 8 May 1956. That date has been propagated as the central revolutionary moment of post-war British theatre. It is described as an “explosion” and an “inert historical marker” (Rebellato 3), and it stands as a “landmark between the old and new worlds” (Eyre, and Wright 236). Not only signals the date the birthday of the *Angry Young Men* movement, the initiation of the *New Wave* and the beginning of the modern era in British drama, its importance also strengthens the idea of a “pre-Osborne Dark Age” (Elsom 1976: 74). Rebellato states that an “immediate effect of calling *Look Back in Anger* an explosion is to emphasise by contrast the supposed silence which preceded it” (3). Osborne certainly changed the volume but, as argued above, the theatre of the immediate post war years had predominantly structural rather than qualitative issues. Furthermore, *Look Back in Anger* was quickly followed by more innovative drama³⁹ and doesn’t appear quite as revolutionary when compared to other plays of the New Wave.

The explosion, therefore, was largely symbolic. Also, it was more or less consciously constructed and the result of significant mediatory processes. Osborne’s play was soon surrounded by a “breakthrough narrative” and thus left “its indelible imprint on the cultural-historical memory” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 3). The “revolution” of 1956 has dominated post-war theatre historiography over the last half century. John Russell Taylor’s “polemical and propagandistic” (Shellard 2008: 7) study of the Angry Young movement *Anger and After* was first published in 1962 and contributed much to the rapid development of a simplified narrative of the then still occurring changes. Only in the mid-1990s have scholars started to challenge the image of *Look Back in Anger* as the single

³⁹ E.g. Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey* (1958), Behan’s *The Hostage* (1958) and Osborne’s second play *The Entertainer* (1957). Cf. Shellard 2008: 7.

most important event which led to a “complete reorientation of British drama that swept all before it” (Shellard 2008: 7).⁴⁰

Billington states that the term ‘revolution’ implies a “forcible and bloody overthrow of the existing order”. This is far from what happened in the theatre of 1956. What actually occurred was a more complex and much slower process, namely “a perceptible shift in the balance of power and a growing tension between an entrenched conservatism and a burgeoning youth culture impatient with old forms and established institutions” (2007: 84). Furthermore, Billington argues that the created myth around *Look Back in Anger* overlooks two “inconvenient” facts. Firstly, it is not correct that Osborne was the first dramatist to expose the “state of the nation” and suggesting that they “were now living in a fractured, godless and violent world”. Secondly, the commercial theatre did certainly not disappear soon after the ESC was established or, how Billington puts it, “lie down and die in the face of the Royal Court onslaught in 1956” (cf. 2007: 87). Musicals continued to be the most popular form of stage entertainment. Socially realist and formally innovative drama, as promoted by the ESC and other institutions like Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop, did struggle intensively to find its audience. Why Osborne’s play was an exception and one of the few financially viable productions will be discussed in the following chapter. Shellard concludes that *Look Back in Anger* certainly “helped reorientate British theatre in a crucial and necessary way but it did not represent a nuclear explosion that initiated a year zero for theatrical activity” (Shellard 2008:14).

4.2. The Establishment of the Royal Court

The mid-fifties were a time when “the theatrical underground in London was already buzzing with the names of Beckett, Ionesco, Genet and Brecht”

⁴⁰ Most prominently: Duff, Charles. *The Lost Summer: The Heyday of the West End Theatre*. London: Nick Hern, 1995; Rebellato, Dan. *1956 And All That: The Making of Modern British Drama*. London: Routledge, 1999; Lacey, Stephen. *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965*. London: Routledge, 1995; and the works of Dominic Shellard (1999, 2000, 2008) who is also project leader of the *Theatre Archive Project* which is organised by the British Library and the University of Sheffield and attempts to reinvestigate British theatre history 1945-1968 from the perspectives of both the theatregoer and the practitioner. See the *Theatre Archive Project* homepage: <<http://www.bl.uk/theatrearchive>>, 26.10.2009. Furthermore, a growing interest in the “practices of mediation and their effect on theatrical developments” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 6) is notable in the works of Lacey (1995), Rebellato (1999), Shellard (1999), Kershaw (2004) and Zarhy-Levo (2008) who exclusively concentrates on this subject.

(Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 12). In 1954, Kenneth Tynan lamented the lack of new English writing when he described the best parts of the London theatre as “a showroom for foreign goods” (*Dead Language* 41). More and more cultural agents – directors, actors, managers and critics – “committed themselves to open support and [attempted] to push the theatre out of the old commercial rut and nudge it into the twentieth century” (Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 10). It was obvious that such support had to include both, following continental European trends and searching for a way to support new English writing. In 1953, some time before the actual foundation of the English Stage Company⁴¹, George Devine⁴² already pronounced his ambition to find a London theatre in which he could present ‘the whole range of contemporary drama’, where he could play in repertoire with a permanent company and create a body of new works by actively encouraging new writers. Having the Royal Court theatre in mind, Devine wanted to pursue three strands of work: European modernism, contemporary revivals of classics, and new plays (cf. Little, and McLaughlin 17; Doty, and Harbin 29). Together with BBC producer Tony Richardson he set out to create an ‘art theatre’ like those of Germany and Russia. A policy statement for such a venture was drawn up but the company was never launched successfully. Devine lacked the economic and social capital on which he could ground his enterprise. For the time being, Devine’s plans were too much idealism and too little pragmatism. In the meantime, another development took place in London which was completely independent from Devine’s efforts but eventually led to the founding of the ESC and provided the organisational basis from which Devine could operate further. Ronald Duncan, poet and playwright, and Oscar Lewenstein, theatrical producer and entrepreneur, also set out to “challenge the West End hegemony” (Shellard 1999: 48). They planned a company which would take plays performed at festivals to London in order to raise the theatrical standards in the city. Together with other men of the theatre

⁴¹ For a detailed discussion of the origins of the Royal Court and the formation of the company see Browne 1975: 1-16; Shellard 1999: 47-51; Little, and McLaughlin 12-15 and Roberts 17-44.

⁴² George Devine, founder of the ESC and first Artistic Director (1956-65) was born on 20 November 1910 and died on 20 January 1966. Cf. Findlater 1981: “In the early 1950’s George Devine and Tony Richardson embarked together on an attempt to revitalize this decaying landscape. Devine, who had begun his stage career 20 years earlier as an actor, had been producer and manager of the pre-war London Theatre Studio and director of the post-war Young Vic, two short-lived but seminal ventures. Richardson, 18 years his junior, was a television producer and, like Devine, a former President of the OUDS (Oxford University Dramatic Society). They set out to lease a London theatre for staging the work of neglected writers, with a small permanent company and a permanent setting” (12).

and a group of socially influential people supportive of the arts they formed the English Stage Company Council⁴³. Most prominently among those were the Earl of Harewood, Alfred Esdaile and Greville Poke (cf. Doty, and Harbin 28). With Neville Blond, they even attracted the support and commitment of a wealthy businessman. Blond became chairman of the ESC Council upon the condition that the company leased a London theatre as a permanent home and with his involvement, the ESC “had changed from a provincial festival service to a continuous metropolitan management” (Wardle 1978: 164). He was described as an “indispensably tough chairman and business-like ally, but also a devoted, generous and fighting friend of the ESC” (Findlater 1981: 133). The quick and successful formation of the ESC was certainly due to such “influential and experienced supporters” (cf. Lacey 44) as Blond or Harewood⁴⁴. Furthermore, it certainly helped that the ESC Board “as a whole was made up of just the sort of people that the Arts Council liked” (Rebellato 67). It is significant that the theatrical institution as such, namely the Board of Governors, was established before the company and before an actual artistic direction was agreed upon. This speaks for the fact that many agents in the field generally acknowledged *something* had to be done about the hegemonic structure of the theatre at that time, though it wasn’t clear what in particular. In the initial stages of formation, a distinct company policy of the English Stage Company and the goals it was to pursue in the future were not clearly defined. However, by 1955 the ESC

was preparing to step boldly into this tremendous gap in English theatre. At that time the founders wanted to have a management to produce the great modern writers, such as Miller and Brecht [...]. They didn’t know that there were any particularly great modern writers in England, but it was hoped that if a hospitable production company could be formed the writers would appear. (Browne 6)

With the promise of a permanent home and some financial stability guaranteed by Blond, the company needed “a permanence of organization” (Browne 9) and as an artistic director someone with a vision to lead the enterprise to fulfil its promising future. The institutional basis had already been established, and the theatrical field suddenly had a position on offer with immense potential for the

⁴³ The ESC Council receives the money from the Arts Council, distributes it to the Company, appoints the artistic director and comments on the work of the company, ideally without interfering.

⁴⁴ Compare Bourdieu’s emphasis on the importance of a “relationship with the powerful” (Bourdieu 1996: 57).

one who could take it. For one, it was within easy reach. That person had to be someone who was not rooted in the commercial theatre, an idealist with plans to “re-position London theatre away from the West End’s disengagement with important contemporary issues” and someone who “believed in the supremacy of the writer” (Shellard 1999: 49). It had to be a modern and practical man of the theatre, someone who would offer continuity of artistic policy and personal direction, and it had to be someone with enough experience and reputation. George Devine was chosen as artistic director by the Council and prominently accepted the post with his associate Tony Richardson, proving himself fit with everything the position asked for. Devine was an “idealist” who was always “interested in improving theatrical standards” (Browne 10). He had acquired his symbolic capital as producer at the London Theatre Studio, which he ran together with Michel Saint-Denis from 1935-39, at the Old Vic and as director of the New Vic after the war. Devine announced the creation of the English Stage Company on 21 July 1955, at that point still at the Kingsway theatre. Very soon after, the company moved to a small Victorian playhouse in south-west London: the Royal Court.

4.2.1. Attracting Writers

Devine and Richardson wanted the Court to be a venue for new plays and modern classics which had an influence on contemporary dramatists. Primarily, the theatre was “directed to producing plays written by dramatists who might not otherwise have been accepted in the commercial theatre, plays which had the appearance of contemporary relevance and which appealed to audiences who were unwilling to use the theatre as an escape from the problems of the time” (Hinchliffe 47). The Royal Court was, and became known as a ‘*writer’s theatre*’. Devine’s primary goal had to be to attract new writers, of course. And that he could achieve only by offering them something other theatres didn’t: independence from box-office takings. In the 1950s, the theatre in London only knew two alternatives: “long run or sudden death” (Bill Williams, Secretary-General of the Arts Council, qtd. in Roberts 14). If a play had not turned immediately into a box office success, it was an instant casualty of the system and probably never to be seen again on stage. Devine wanted to change that by offering a certain degree of autonomy from economic constraints and principles of hierarchisation. He supported and produced whatever he believed

in.⁴⁵ The box office was Devine's least concern, and he had to struggle hard to keep his theatre open nevertheless. For his writers he claimed the "right to fail" (Devine 1961: 132) and consequently put up with the fact that audiences could be rare. Success meant success in Devine's terms, and failure meant failure in terms of the box office only. The theatrical successes of the immediate post-war years were not what the Royal Court was interested in, and through the promotion of a "right to fail" Devine proved his theatre's position on the most autonomous pole of production in the field: "success is rejected by the defenders of an autonomous principle of hierarchization as evidence of a mercenary interest in economic and political profits" (Bourdieu, 1996: 218). In grave opposition to the West End, Devine saw the plays he promoted as being in advance of normal public taste (cf. Little, and McLaughlin 19). By staging plays in repertory, they could be "nursed gently with occasional performances, or revived after an interval" (Milne *Taking Stock at the Court* 23). Eventually, a play would find its audience.⁴⁶ Devine could only provide that kind of autonomy by being autonomous himself: through the support of his governors and the Arts Council of Great Britain.⁴⁷ "Autonomy", states Rebellato "was crucial to the changes in theatre practice". Subsidy was a "precondition to the process of professionalization" (83). In Bourdieu's terms, autonomy is crucial to innovation and the production of pure art. Never before in the history of British theatre had a field proved to be more procreative in its efforts towards more autonomy than that of the late fifties. Furthermore, intervention from the state was minimised through the staging of censored plays as club performances. It is crucial not to forget that until 1956, young and unknown dramatists only had two possibilities: "having [their] play produced by a commercial management or not having it

⁴⁵ Zarhy-Levo states that all agents (mediators) in the theatrical field who endorse or fail a work of art are driven by their own "current conceptions of artistic quality and merit, in addition to their ideological or political orientations" (cf. Zarhy-Levo 2008: 2).

⁴⁶ Compare, for example, the plays of John Arden, now regarded one of the most influential dramatists of the time. He did not write a single play that was financially successful at the Court. If it wasn't for Devine's genuine enthusiasm about Arden, probably not one other play of his would have been staged after the first "failures" of *Live Like Pigs* in 1958 and *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* in 1959, which both only filled 20-25% of the theatre (cf. Findlater 1981: 44).

⁴⁷ The Royal Court received £2,500 from the Arts Council as a pre-production grant and £7,000 as a subsidy for the first year (1956/57). "Without that state aid the ESC could have had no hope of enduring. Without its expectation it would probably never have started" (cf. Findlater 1981: 16). Furthermore, Neville Blond advanced £8,000 and guarantees came from Harewood, Esdaile and Poke. For the Royal Court's financial situation in the 1950s and 60s see Liebenstein-Kurtz 97-103.

done at all [...]” (Eyre, and Wright 252). The scheme of the Royal Court, therefore, was revolutionary at the time, and recognised as such by the media:

On Monday the English Stage Company opens at the Royal Court Theatre under the direction of Mr George Devine, and despairing young playwrights must have rubbed their eyes in astonishment when they read what are to be the aims of the new enterprise. ‘Ours is not to be a producer’s theatre, nor an actor’s theatre,’ Mr Devine announces, ‘it is to be a writer’s theatre.’⁴⁸

In 1955, Devine immediately advertised in *The Stage* the Court’s interest in new plays (cf. Little, and McLaughlin 20). He was quite clear about what he wanted: “[W]e are not going in for experiment for the sake of experiment. We are not *avant-garde*, or highbrow, or a *côterie* set. We want to build a vital, living, *popular theatre*” (qtd. in Browne 12). Devine appealed directly to the writers and the ESC soon received more worthy scripts than it could possibly accommodate. Besides a writer’s workshop that was set up, Devine established a series by the name of *Sunday Night Productions without Decor*. The series was designed “to try out new writing in the raw” (Rebellato 86) and to stage productions which were not considered fit for the large stage. Plays were staged without scenery and were only presented once, merely to give writers the chance to see their work in performance and to find out how the audience would react to it. In that way, “plays which were deemed too risky for full production could nevertheless receive a public airing” (Lacey 47). With the Royal Court, George Devine and his board of governors achieved to establish an institution and a platform for new writing with the greatest possible autonomy from the existing field of London theatre at the time.

4.3. Look Back in Anger

Angus Wilson’s *The Mulberry Bush*, the opening production of the ESC on 2 April 1956, showed little indication of the distinctive course the new company wished to pursue. Shellard states that Devine’s decision to open with the work of a novelist and choosing “to deploy the potentially controversial *Look Back in Anger* as the third production” displayed “his renowned pragmatism” because he was able “to reassure the more timid members of his board, whilst remaining true to his own hopes for the company” (Shellard 1999: 50). The English Stage

⁴⁸ *The Times*, 31 March 1956. Qtd. in Little, and McLaughlin 17.

Company started its distinctive course with the premiere of *Look Back in Anger* on 8 May 1956. This production certainly gave a clear direction to the new enterprise, even though, when Devine received the play and met the young and unknown John Osborne in 1955, he couldn't have possibly guessed the actual impact the play would eventually have on the Royal Court and the whole field of London theatre. However, he was convinced that this was the sort of work they ought to do, a "complete 'shot in the dark' but a completely new dramatist and a powerful play" (Little, and McLaughlin 24). Osborne himself points out the significance of Devine's support for his play:

Nobody else but George Devine would ever have put on that old play of mine: that's the absolute truth. It had already been sent back by about twenty-five managers and agents when I answered the advertisement in the *Stage* and posted it to the English Stage Company. And nobody else but George would have supported it, to the hilt, in spite of a lukewarm reception by most critics; in spite of a slow box office; and in spite of being attacked [...] by a lot of people he respected in the conventional theatre [...]. [N]owadays it isn't realized how much hostility George had to face in 1956" (Osborne 1994: 87).

Osborne's career was "launched not by public patronage but by private faith" (Osborne 1994: 28). Without Devine's support for the play, *Look Back in Anger* might have never reached the stage and would have faced a form of censorship, not by the Lord Chamberlain "but by the managements, on the grounds that it departed too far from their estimate of public taste to warrant the gamble of production" (Kitchin 99).

The great success of *Look Back in Anger* is only partly due to the play itself but owes a much greater debt to the way it was promoted, mediated and how it met an internal demand of the field to renew itself. However, there is one very significant feature about it that contributed to its great impact, namely its strong formal similarity with the 'well-made play'. *Look Back in Anger* relies heavily upon the exact kinds of plot devices which were familiar to the audience of that time. The form of the play, with its chronological, cause-and-effect structure was extremely conventional and hardly "revolutionary". However, it was the "cynical view of middle-class impotence, spun out in brilliant rhetoric through the character of Jimmy Porter, [which] was unprecedented in British drama" (Doty, and Harbin 2). Lacey argues that "if we were to ask the question why it should be *this* play and not, say, *Waiting for Godot* that was seen to break new ground,

then the answer would lie at least partly in the familiarity of its dramatic and theatrical form. It has become a truism to say that the play was innovatory at the level of 'content' rather than 'form', and the issue here is partly to do with accessibility" (28). Bourdieu states that each new work of art defines itself in relation to all the other works of art that exist in the field.⁴⁹ Osborne's play gained its revolutionary image in terms of content only, and that it could achieve by being similar, therefore comparable, on a formal level to all the other plays of the period. Playwrights of the mid-fifties certainly experimented with form, most prominently Samuel Beckett with *Waiting for Godot*, and the public even acknowledged that there was something new, possibly interesting and innovative about them. However, when *Godot* opened in London a year before *Anger*, nobody quite knew how to take it. It caused irritation, primarily. Osborne's play, however, followed conventions which were immediately readable and thus the audience and especially critics focussed on its content and the issues it seemed to be raising. While *Godot* was certainly more innovative on a general level and had a greater impact internationally, *Anger* was a social and truly English phenomenon. The success of *Look Back in Anger* indicated that the social and political expectations of theatre had altered. The significance of the period which followed the premiere was that it connected theatre to social and political debates rather than to aesthetic ones. The new drama was placed "in the centre of a much wider realignment in British society, in which many post-war certainties were challenged and redefined" (cf. Lacey 2). In order to challenge and redefine, the Court first needed a formally conventional play to break through with audiences and to attract a new generation of theatre-goers and writers. Liebenstein-Kurtz points out that *Look Back in Anger* was especially significant because it made contact between the Royal Court and a new generation of dramatists who, only through Osborne's play, found out about the Court, its goals and the chances it offered to them. The success of *Look Back in Anger* contributed much to their motivation to write and send in their plays (cf. 78-79). To support his scheme of structural change

⁴⁹ Compare Bourdieu: "Each position-taking [...] is defined (objectively and sometimes intentionally) in the relation to the universe of position-takings and in relation to the *problematic* as a *space of possibles* indicated or suggested there. It receives its distinctive *value* from the negative relationship which unites it to the coexisting position-takings to which it is objectively referred and which determine it by circumscribing it" (1996: 233).

and the advancement of new writing, Devine desperately needed a group of young and unknown dramatists.

It is true that the initiative for change can be traced back, almost by definition, to new (meaning younger) entrants. These are the ones who are also the most deprived of specific capital, and who [...] only exist in so far as [...] they manage to assert their identity (that is, their difference) and get it known and recognized [...] by imposing new modes of thought and expression which break with current modes of thought [...].
(Bourdieu, 1996: 239-240)

It was clear that the young generation had something to say about the world they lived in, about the state of British society and about issues that never before found their way onto the London stage. From 8 May 1956, the Royal Court offered them to say it – or shout it out loud – in the form of a play. *Look Back in Anger* was one of the crucial steps in post-war British theatre “regain[ing] its will to live, emerg[ing] from its coma and start[ing] to show signs of interest in the world around it” (Tynan *Look Behind the Anger* 199).

It would be wrong to argue that Devine foresaw the huge impact *Look Back in Anger* had on the Court and on the theatre as a whole, therefore it cannot be said that staging the play was a calculated step towards a particular direction he wanted to pursue. William Gaskill states that *Anger*, actually, came “from quite a different area than the poetic kind of art theatre vaguely envisioned” and “swung the whole movement in a completely different direction” (Doty, and Harbin 31):

Immediately, everyone realized that what they had been dreaming of, this European art theatre, was no longer the kind of theatre that would be realized, but that the writers themselves would dictate the character of the new theatre. The writing, directing, acting, and design talent began to come from a rather different social class and a regional background different from what was usual at the time. [...] The greatness of George [Devine] was really to turn his back on Saint-Denis and that whole European art theatre influence and to say, ‘This IS the new theatre, and I will go along with this as I see it is the right moment for it,’ instead of pursuing something which had nothing to do with reality. He pragmatically saw what was actually going to work and that conditioned [...] the life of the Court. (Gaskill in Doty, and Harbin 31)

It was Osborne’s play, and the way it was mediated and received, which dictated the course of the Royal Court by giving it a clear direction. Before *Anger* opened, no one could have guessed that the Court would soon become “identified as a symbolic centre of rebellion and dissent among young artists, intellectuals and theatre workers” (Findlater 1981: 29).

4.4. The Mediatory Process

The fact that the great impact of Osborne's first play stood in close relation to the same socio-cultural, economic and political factors which also conditioned the overall change in Britain's post-war theatrical arena is out of question and has been argued elsewhere (see Lacey 1995). This chapter deals with the processes of mediation which constituted the quick success of Osborne's play and established the Royal Court's firm position in the theatrical field.⁵⁰ Only through multiple and powerful mediators could *Look Back in Anger* turn into the most critically acclaimed piece of theatre writing in the twentieth century, gain its "explosive" character and narrative of "revolution". It was certainly not the play alone which made its premiere on 8 May 1956 known as the "event which marks 'then' off decisively from 'now'" (Taylor 1969: 9).

In fact, the first night of *Look Back in Anger* "gave no hint of the meteoric success of the play" (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 32). Only through a "mediatory chain reaction" and a "snowballing of recognition" (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 217) could the production acquire its immense reputation. One of the first external⁵¹ agents to recognise the importance of Osborne and sense the impact he would have on the London theatre was Kenneth Tynan⁵², at that time critic for the *Observer*. It is another myth that surrounds the production to say that Tynan's review was the *only* favourable whereas all others condemned Osborne to a rapid downfall. Not all reviews were favourable in the way that they were uniformly positive, but "what is more important is that virtually all the reviews thought that the play was *significant*" (Lacey 18). Harold Hobson, critic for the *Sunday Times* and equally prominent and influential as Tynan, referred to John Osborne as "a writer of

⁵⁰ For an extensive discussion of the subject see Zarhy-Levo 2008: 15-62. Zarhy-Levo argues that most processes of mediation share three essentials: placement, forces, and channels (see 2008: 7ff). The outcome of mediation is the "placement of the subject" (11). That idea and also Zarhy-Levo's methods of analysis resemble closely Bourdieu's ideas of symbolic capital and the field as a social arena in which various agents operate in pursuit of better positions. Whereas my analysis concentrates on the development of the field as a whole, Zarhy-Levo focuses on a few particular dramatists and institutions at a specific point in time. See Zarhy-Levo, Yael. *The Making of Theatrical Reputations: Studies from the Modern London Theatre*. Iowa City: U of Iowa Press, 2008.

⁵¹ "external" here refers to "outside of the Royal Court", namely not one of the agents involved directly with the Court or the production. Devine and Richardson were of course the first to appreciate the play by staging it.

⁵² Kenneth Peacock Tynan was born on 2 April 1927 and died on 26 July 1980. After graduating from Oxford he worked as a freelance director before he started to write reviews for *The Spectator*, *The Evening Standard*, *The Daily Sketch*, *The New Yorker* and *The Observer*. Tynan soon became one of the most influential post-war theatre critics and was appointed dramaturge of the National Theatre in 1963.

outstanding promise” (qtd. in Rowse paragraph 25). Tynan’s review is considered significant because it best described the potential the play bore, what developments Osborne had paved the way for with it and what, actually, was so special – or “revolutionary”, if you want – about the production.

Look Back in Anger presents post-war youth as it really is [...]. To have done this at all would be a signal achievement; to have done it in a first play is a minor miracle. All the qualities are there, qualities one had despaired of ever seeing on the stage [...]. The [Jimmy] Porters of our time deplore the tyranny of ‘good taste’ and refuse to accept ‘emotional’ as a term of abuse; they are classless, and they are also leaderless. Mr. Osborne is their first spokesman in the London theatre. He has been lucky in his sponsors (the English Stage Company), his director (Tony Richardson), and his interpreters [...]. I agree that *Look Back in Anger* is likely to remain a minority taste. What matters, however, is the size of the minority. I estimate it at roughly 6,733,000, which is the number of people in this country between the ages of twenty and thirty. And this figure will doubtless be swelled by refugees from other age-groups who are curious to know precisely what the contemporary young pup is thinking and feeling. I doubt if I could love anyone who did not wish to see *Look Back in Anger*. It is the best young play of its decade. (Tynan *Voice of the Young* 112-113)

Tynan’s review appeared in the *Observer* on 13 May 1956 and is regarded to be the “critical turning point” (Heilpern 171) for Osborne and the ESC because it “laid the groundwork for the perception of the play as revolutionary” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 53). It linked the play, its protagonist and its author – and certainly the ESC as an institution – “to an emerging discourse about the nature of post-war youth” (Lacey 19). For the first months, however, the play did stay a “minority taste” and, despite Tynan’s rave review, played to small audiences. Tynan’s support certainly helped the play to survive over these months. “The commercial value of good reviews is that they can provide that initial boost to productions which can carry them through the awkward first weeks before the swell of popular opinion gathers strength” (Elsom 1976: 88). Devine, and the whole enterprise behind him, felt affirmed in the course they were taking, and from that moment on they actively campaigned the play in search for an audience.

One of their clever strategies, intentional or unintentional, was to ‘jump on the train’ Tynan had pointed them out in his review. English drama, at that time, was clearly in search for a movement outside the constraints of over-decorated, convenient, middle-class theatre (cf. Rogoff 33). Thus, all they had to do in

order to attract more attention from the media was to create a label which could be easily marketed. The press officer of the Royal Court Theatre, George Fearon, coined the term “angry young man” in order to publicise *Look Back in Anger*. The term was picked up quickly by the media because it was applicable not only to the play’s main character and the author himself but to really anyone under the age of thirty. Furthermore, “angry young man” was backed up by the review of the time’s most influential theatre critic who not only showed his open support for the play but whose review legitimised the term. The catchphrase “was employed with relish by journalists and for a while became the icon for the New Theatre” (Peacock 8). The fact that the Royal Court was soon considered not only vital but “emotionally charged and combative” in the kinds of drama it produced was to a great part due to such marketing strategies (Peacock 8). One play, however, no matter how innovative it was on the level of content in theatre writing, was not enough to define a whole movement. Luckily, other developments were taking place simultaneously in the theatrical field. Other young and unknown playwrights had their work produced by the Court. The media identified them almost instantaneously as “a group of young, committed writers dedicated to challenging the status quo” (Shellard 1999: 56). Furthermore, Brecht’s Epic Theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd reached London at approximately the same time as that *New Wave* of English dramatists. The media tended to “lump” significantly different aesthetics together under the term *Angry Young Men*, a made-believe, joint movement of young dramatists with an anti-Establishment attitude represented by writers as dissimilar as John Arden, John Osborne, Ann Jellicoe, Arnold Wesker and John Mortimer. Bourdieu prominently states that the “gathering together of a corps” can be seen as a “precondition for the appearance of the *corporative effect* from which the most famous literary and artistic groups have drawn immense symbolic profits” (Bourdieu 1996: 267). There undeniably was “a new impetus and a formidable output” (Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 14) of playwriting at that time but only after years it became obvious that simply the sum of new works was significant and not any sort of aesthetic movement they all seemed to pursue in agreement.

In terms of “represent-ability” in the media, the grouping together of a corps of new writers, rather than separating a number of individuals, certainly helped enormously to a quick and effective process of mediation.

[T]he critical context established by the critics’ discourse around the Movement and the media’s growing interest in the AYM are closely interrelated and appear to constitute a major factor in accounting for the reception of Osborne’s play. (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 39-40)

One must not forget, however, that even the *Angry Young Men* as a whole movement still only were a “minority affair” (Tynan *Look Behind the Anger* 200). The invention of a theatrical movement⁵³ provided the basis for an interest from the media in young writers and modern drama, and that interest certainly proved to be crucial in the “marketing” of Osborne’s symbolic value. However, a public interest alone did not yet attract a large audience. It needed other clever moves from Osborne and the Royal Court to win over the masses.

For one thing, as Zarhy-Levo states, it was Osborne’s own “willingness to collaborate with his various mediators” such as journalists and ESC directors that contributed to the development of his career, even though it was only “complimentary to the opportunities with which he was presented” (2008: 37). By the end of 1956, John Osborne had become a true theatrical celebrity, representative of a whole new generation of playwrights and legitimate spokesman of the post-war youth. The true breakthrough of his play, however, was accomplished through a few minutes exposure on national television when extracts of the play were broadcasted on BBC on 16 October 1956, reaching an audience estimated at 5 million.⁵⁴

The *Angry Young Men* were essentially the first literary/dramatic phenomenon to become a major media ‘event’, taking advantage of the new opportunities afforded by the expansion in popular journalism, television sales and the newly formed commercial television network. (Lacey 17)

The changing landscape of the media, an independent sub-field in itself, was certainly one reason why a group of playwrights who had relatively little in common were treated and mediated as a coherent phenomenon. The fact that *Look Back in Anger*, and with it the Royal Court, but did make it on television

⁵³ For an illustration of the emergence of the Angry Young Movement see Zarhy-Levo 2008: 38-40.

⁵⁴ Cf. also Shellard 1999: “Tynan’s review was tremendous publicity, but it was not until the BBC televised an extract on 16 October 1956, viewed by an estimated five million people, that box-office takings dramatically increased, from £900 to £1,700 per week” (57).

was due to active campaigning from Devine, Blond and Fearon.⁵⁵ Their efforts proved to be a successful “mediating tactic” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 37). The exposure on television increased box-office takings enormously and suddenly, *Look Back in Anger* really did resound throughout the land. Only a few months after the ESC was established on the outermost pole of autonomous production, the whole of London suddenly looked towards the little theatre on Sloane Square. *Look Back in Anger* necessarily aroused interest from the heteronomous pole of large-scale production:

The West End managers did their business best to ignore the implications of the experiments at the Royal Court and Theatre Workshop. They were patronizing. They even occasionally came visiting like rich uncles to see what the boys were fooling about with. But eventually they were forced to take notice because the boys looked like invading their own sacred frame of reference – the box office. (Osborne 1994: 9)

The production of Osborne’s first play became “a key cultural event largely as a result of the gradual convergence of many and varied mediating factors” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 52). Especially in relation to the success of *Look Back in Anger* it is important to acknowledge the great number of people and institutions involved in the successful process of mediation and legitimisation by showing their support for the production and the enterprise which made it possible. The agents of the London theatre scene *wanted* change – they *wanted* an institution like the Royal Court. The field demanded it, and the supporters were numerous. That contributed to the rapid legitimisation of *Look Back in Anger*, no matter how good or innovative the play really was. Zarhy-Levo argues that the “power of mediation can be seen to reside not only in the authoritative or prominent stance of the operating mediators but also in the number of mediating parties involved and the extent of the repertoire of channels exploited” (2008: 14). Equally as much as the production of *Look Back in Anger* was supported by various mediating agents, the institution of the ESC itself greatly profited from numerous mediating authorities. *Encore Magazine*⁵⁶ and other reviewers of

⁵⁵ In early September 1956, Devine wrote a letter to Cecil Madden, BBC Programme organiser, saying: “I want to ask you if you can once more help us here. *Look Back in Anger* [...] is not doing quite as well as we would like, and Neville [Blond] suggested that a TV excerpt, judiciously chosen, might help us a lot. [...] The play is supposed to be a ‘conversational must’ these days, so I don’t think it is an unexciting suggestion. Can you see what could be done – and naturally, the sooner the better.” See Shellard 2008: 167.

⁵⁶ *Encore* was certainly one of the most important mediative institutions of the late fifties. The magazine helped to generate and shape a critical debate about the *New Wave* of writing and

various papers contributed significantly to the mediation of the necessity of an institution like the Royal Court. Zarhy-Levo states that they “felt a need to make a case for the importance of the ESC” (2008: 27) even before its first season:

Responding to the company’s declared mission, these external mediators assigned the ESC a special niche in the London theatre community, which accorded with their perceptions of the needs of the time. In their enthusiasm for the potential of the ESC [...] they were not simply reporting on the formation of a new company and its initial productions; they were taking on an active role as advocates for a new idea of British drama and theatre. [...] They proceeded to turn their own expectations and hopes into a cultural program for both the ESC and the London theatre. [...] They thereby set the grounds for the historical narrative that served to launch the ESC, the plays and careers of new playwrights [...]. The critics’ reception of the ESC is a prime example of a key moment in the process of mediation. Their campaigns in support of the ESC demonstrate both their attempt to influence the perception of the new company in terms of its designated placement and their own function as active participants in dictating new agendas and developments. (2008: 27-28)

The Royal Court as an institution was legitimised not only by its own people and a small appreciative audience but certainly by the multiple authoritarian figures in the theatrical field who wanted, and consequently supported such an institution. Many of them were influential critics. Their voice of support was most crucial for the Court to gain its firm position in the field. Wardle states that soon after the ESC was established it “bathed in fashionable publicity” (1978: 191).

The celebration of the ESC certainly had to do with the celebration of Devine. He was the “guiding force” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 24) behind the institution and managed to project the symbolic capital he had acquired as an actor and director, as well as through his association with Saint-Denis or Gielgud and innovative theatre before 1956 onto the company he led. Devine “had the ‘symbolic goods’ of innovative leadership to carry forward the development and accomplishment of the company” and was able to “exploit the benefits that came with his growing reputation” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 25). In conclusion:

the Royal Court. It was published from 1956 until the mid-sixties and “closely associated with the explosion of theatrical activity after 1956” (Lacey 38). *Encore* connected writers and producers to trends and developments in the theatre all over Europe. It thus became a crucial medium through which influences from the continent found their way to England. The magazine reflected upon the current state of the theatre in the country and “kept continually alert to new developments in the drama, irrespective of aesthetic cliques and cabals” (Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 11-12). It “provided a forum for a number of the most prominent theatrical and cultural mediators of the era, including Kenneth Tynan, Charles Marowitz, Peter Hall, Peter Brook, George Devine [...], Irving Wardle, Martin Esslin, and John Russell Taylor” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 55).

In the 1960s [...] many observers felt that the English Stage Company was the most innovative theatre company in England. This perception was based upon four major factors: the correspondence between the ESC aims and the emergent expectations of critics; the reputation of the ESC artistic director, George Devine; the association of the Royal Court's playwrights with the highly publicized Angry trend; and the acclaim and fame of *Look Back in Anger* and its author, John Osborne. (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 107)

Finally, the ESC and *Look Back in Anger* benefitted from a process I'd like to call *cross-legitimation*. Both the institution and the writer were new entrants to the field, and neither could have succeeded alone within the old structure. The Royal Court couldn't have existed (or followed its policy) without non-conventional plays like Osborne's and *Look Back in Anger*, on the other side, would probably never have been staged in the commercial theatre. They provided for each other a means of existence.

4.4.1. The Historical Memory

[O]ne of the most fundamental properties of all fields of cultural production [is] the essentially magical logic of the production of the producer and of the product as fetishes. (Bourdieu 1996: 182)

Look Back in Anger is the greatest myth, hype and fetish of 20th century British theatre. The first performance on 8 May 1956 stands out in basically any history of the theatre of that time. Similarly, Tynan's review soon became famous as "a recurring component of the narratives constructed around the play" (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 52) and almost equally appears in all studies of post-war British theatre. Shellard describes it as "an important part of the cultural mythology surrounding the play" (2008: 170). The period following 1956 seems over-mythicised in itself because the story of the "revolution" has simply been told too many times (cf. Lacey 2). It started as early as 1962 when John Russell Taylor published *Anger and After*, a highly influential study of contemporary British drama which presented Osborne's play as the beginning of a new era (see Taylor 1969). In his book *1956 And All That: The Making of Modern British Drama*, Dan Rebellato offers a counter-reading of British theatre in the mid-fifties and tries "to make the familiar unfamiliar" because the story of 1956 "has been so often

retold that its shape, its force, its power and meaning have been lost in the familiarity of the telling" (226).⁵⁷

It is crucial to understand two facts: one, that standings of particular events, movements, aesthetics and agents in the cultural or historical memory change over time through processes of mediation. And two, that

the claim now made for the play as the water-shed of post-war theatre is something developed *after* the event. It did not seem so at the time. Its importance is a myth which, like all myths, feeds on itself, and very much aided, by that brilliant coinage of the Angry Young Man. (Shellard 2000: 29)

This view is confirmed in an article published in *Theatre World* in January 1957 which sums up the previous theatrical year in retrospect:

1956 will not go down in theatrical history as an outstanding year but there were memorable features which are likely to have repercussions for the future. These included the formation of the English Stage Company under George Devine which has already presented some excellent productions, including the outstanding first play, *Look Back in Anger*, by John Osborne, from whom much is expected in years to come. (F.S. *Over the Footlights* 1957: 7)

Well, 1956 did go down in theatrical history as an outstanding year. The recognition process of the event as significant, its mediation to the public and anchorage in the historical memory was rapid. One year later in the same retrospective article, *Theatre World* already acknowledged that "[i]t is certain that few men have contributed more to English drama in the last year or two than George Devine" (F.S. *Over the Footlights* 1958: 5).

In conclusion, historically it is recognised that *Look Back in Anger* and the English Stage Company at the Royal Court contributed most decisively to the development of an anti-hegemonic theatre in the decades since 1956. The formation of a company producing new works with subsidies from the

⁵⁷ Rebellato tries to deconstruct the image of *Look Back in Anger* as the central turning point in modern British Drama. He argues that the theatre of the forties and early fifties was quite unlike it is represented in most historical accounts, that it involved far-reaching transformations of the modes of theatrical production and reception and that the theatrical revolution was motivated by different concerns from those conventionally proposed (cf. Rebellato 8). He further argues that the history of the Royal Court and the West End in the 1950s is usually misrepresented in three ways as a fairly-tale picture of David opposing Goliath. Those misrepresentations are that "the Royal Court should not be simply opposed to the West End, that the criticisms of the West End were misplaced, and that the Court's success was not out of the blue, but was shaped by wider forces organizing the cultural life of the nation." Rebellato considers the Arts Council as the key figure which links the two sides. *Look Back in Anger* marks a symbolic revolution also because it coincided and supported the idea of subsidised theatre as a new institutional arrangement (cf. 38).

government was crucial for what soon became the mainstream of British theatre (cf. McGrath 1981: 9). The ESC's outstanding success "resulted from the combined actions of various participants in and commentators on its cultural significance"⁵⁸. Osborne himself notes that a "legend [had] been deliberately circulated that a revolution [had] taken place. The reality is that a revolution [had only] begun to take place" (Osborne 1994: 6).

Excursus I – Mediating the Legitimate: Kenneth Tynan and the Critic

Even though it was due to multiple mediating agents that *Look Back in Anger* succeeded, Kenneth Tynan has more than once shown that one prominent critic pronouncing his support for a production can easily determine its success or failure. No matter if it was *Waiting for Godot*, *Look Back in Anger* or those processes of promotion and mediation which led to the establishment of a National Theatre in 1963, Kenneth Tynan always seemed to have at least one of his fingers in the pie. Tynan was certainly one of the agents in post-war British theatre with the most power to say what is legitimate, especially in terms of the new, young movement against the old structures.

One of the central stakes in the literary (etc.) rivalries is the monopoly of literary legitimacy, that is, among other things, the monopoly of the power to say with authority who is authorized to call himself writer (etc.) or even to say who is a writer and who has the authority to say who is a writer; (Bourdieu 1996: 224)

In other words, the "*power of consecration* of producers and products" (Bourdieu 1996: 224) is one of the most central acquirable merits in the literary field, and all participating agents struggle for its monopoly. In post-war Britain, there was not *one* definition of what a "legitimate writer" was⁵⁹. There certainly was an image of playwriting and dramatist which was no longer regarded legitimate by an increasing number of theatrical agents: the drama of the West

⁵⁸ Zarhy-Levo 2008: 58. Zarhy-Levo further: "Leading figures such as Devine and Richardson acting as in-house mediators, or Tynan and Taylor acting as external mediators, endorsed the play because it met their own aims or needs. Their modes of operation and the particular impact of their mediation were born of pre-existing conditions favorable to the play, and of emergent constellations of agents – members of the ESC council, producers, members of award committees, reviewers, theatre critics, literary critics, film critics, interviewers on television or in the press, academics, publishers, journalists – whose pursuit of their own discrete interests led to their forces being joined in collaboration."

⁵⁹ Therefore, "if the literary field (etc.) is universally the site of a struggle over definition of a writer (etc.), then there is no universal definition of the writer, and analysis never encounters anything but definitions corresponding to a state of the struggle for the imposition of the legitimate definition of the writer" (Bourdieu 1996: 224). The legitimate definition of the writer always has to be seen in relation to the state of the field at a specific point in time.

End. Critics like Tynan or Hobson were just few of those who no longer accepted the old school of well-made playwriting and escapist subjects as the approved standard. The field's internal conditions demanded a redefinition of "the playwright" and "legitimate drama"⁶⁰. The principles of consecration were reshuffled. Powerful agents like Tynan or Devine contributed to the fact that the direction in which those principles developed was that away from heteronomy towards autonomy. Tynan, not actually a "theatre practitioner" but a critic, was certainly one of the most powerful men of the theatrical field. Since the definition of the writer is never explicitly given and accepted, the critic provides "initial legitimacy for playwrights not yet accepted into the theatrical canon" (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 163).⁶¹ It was to the great advantage of British theatre that Tynan was a promoter of the young and unknown. Furthermore, he was different to other critics in terms of active campaigning and foreseeing necessary developments which would eventually revolutionise the field. Being in advance, Tynan was often the first to identify and describe the possibilities offered by the field. Thus, he paved the way for numerous developments of the late fifties and early sixties by his mediatory power alone. Unfailingly he campaigned and promoted the progressive developments he stood in for.

Tynan was, without a doubt, the model of a modern major critic. With a blend of humility to stage and disregard of the audience, he stated [...] 'the critic must not attempt to teach playwright and actor their jobs [...] The last thing a critic ought to be concerned with is the people who read him first. He should write for posterity'. (1987: 101-102; qtd. in Rebellato 118)

Tynan had a firm idea of the role of the critic in a changing landscape of theatrical production. He argues that, if a critic is to take his work seriously, he technically is "on the same side" as all producers of theatre and should not be in opposition to them (cf. Tynan 1964: 12). Peter Brook confirms that the critic, even with a bad review, is "serving the theatre when he is hounding out incompetence" (Brook 31). Critics for influential newspapers (and other media) have to accept the responsibility which comes with their occupation of powerful

⁶⁰ As argued above, Devine originally imagined it to be a formally innovative school of writing like that of Brecht or the *Theatre of the Absurd*. With *Look Back in Anger*, "legitimate" writing in England soon turned out to be quite radically different.

⁶¹ Zarhy-Levo further states that it is the critic who "creates" the writer as "a critical construct". The forming of such a dramatist's construct not only "serves the reviewers in the process of admitting a new playwright into the theatrical canon, but also reinforces their function and authority in the theatrical field" (see 2008: 163).

positions in the field. In his role as a “pathmaker”, the critic is given a certain “power for good”, but equally he possesses the “power of destruction” and “joins the deadly game when he does not accept this responsibility” (cf. Brook 32). The “vital critic”, states Brook, “is the critic who has clearly formulated for himself what the theatre could be – and who is bold enough to throw this formula into jeopardy each time he participates in a theatrical event” (Brook 33).⁶²

Critics are of uttermost importance to the theatre. Employing multiple channels such as print media, radio or television they act as external mediators and “form, cultivate, and modify a playwright’s image as dramatist” (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 161). Furthermore, they present

the first critical judgment on individual productions of a dramatist’s plays, constitute a major factor in shaping the perception of that playwright’s dramatic style and lay the groundwork for the critical assessments that follow, including academic studies, which further influence the position of the playwright in cultural or historical memory. (Zarhy-Levo 2008: 161-162).

Thorn describes the three major tasks of the critic as “Bericht, Vergleich und Vermittlung” (66). A precondition for the job is an ability to perceive new dimensions of artworks (cf. Thorn 67) and put them into a relation to the overall artistic field. Throughout the process of a dramatist’s acceptance into the theatrical canon reviewers apply four strategies in order to define, locate and promote the playwright within the overall theatrical field: firstly “comparison” and “forecasting” in order to place the dramatist within the overall context of the theatre tradition, and secondly “name giving” and “formation of the trademark package” in order to promote and market his particular means of theatrical expression.⁶³ When multiple powerful critics join forces and vouch for the same piece or agent applying the same strategies, their powers of legitimisation

⁶² For a discussion of the critic’s position, responsibility and role in the theatrical field of the late fifties and early sixties see also Marowitz, Charles; Brook, Peter; Esslin, Martin, et.al. “Are Critics any Use?” *Encore Magazine* 40, 9.6 (Nov-Dec.1962). 22-46.

⁶³ See Zarhy-Levo 1998: 61-65 and 2008: 162-163. For detailed descriptions of these strategies see Zarhy-Levo 1998: 63-64. Zarhy-Levo concludes that the process of a playwright’s acceptance into the theatrical canon “entails two oppositional, though complementary, critical tendencies: the presentation of the recognizable and the introduction of the original. The construct devised on the basis of a playwright’s work is the by-product of the amalgamation of these two critical tendencies” (2008: 163). In her article *Theatrical Success: A Behind-the-Scenes Story*, Zarhy-Levo argues that “critical consensus [is] a driving force in the process that determines a playwright’s acceptance into the theatrical canon [and that] critical acceptance itself determines how history is reconstructed” (1998: 61).

naturally increase exponentially.⁶⁴ Through their powers of legitimisation, critics have to be accepted as potent operative agents in the field of theatrical production.

4.5. The Running System at the Court

By 1958, the English Stage Company at the Royal Court had been firmly established in the theatrical field of London and the fact that it still survives today proves its unique position in the field. Osborne's first play was not enough to secure this position but it was Devine's leadership and the sum of events over the first crucial years which established the ESC in the field. Its importance was soon acknowledged not only by theatrical agents but by the public at large. At the end of the ESC's third year, Devine had accomplished a clear identity and reputation for the Royal Court in London and wrote "I have fought myself to my knees [but today] we have a world wide reputation... a proud record, and financially we have more than we started with" (Roberts 67). The first years of the ESC, indeed, were a struggle through and through. Running the theatre on a daily basis was not easy in a structure still heavily dominated by the commercial sector. At the end of 1956, Tynan noted that even after *Look Back in Anger* the London theatre still was "hermetically sealed off from life", as Arthur Miller had put it several months before. The play had merely offered "an oasis of reality" (*Backwards and Forwards* 149). One success, even as symbolically valuable as *Anger*, was not enough to nourish the still risky position of the Court in the field and keep the theatre open in the long-run. The ESC, besides Theatre Workshop perhaps, certainly was the leading enterprise of experimental alternative theatre. Devine notes that "We are the spearhead here, but the problem is how do you keep sharpening the spear? [...] we are at the mercy of whatever comes in" (qtd. in Doty, and Harbin 209). Symbolically, he could only remain the Company's value by bringing in new writers and new writing. And that he could achieve only by further offering them the "right to fail". That right, however, was expensive. The Court's insistence on this principle often brought the institution on the brink of bankruptcy. Equally expensive were

⁶⁴ Cf. Zarhy-Levo 2008: "[W]hen several authoritative critics join forces in promoting a production, play, or playwright and, moreover, when they converge with other prominent external or in-house mediators, their influence on the placement assigned to the work or playwright in question might be extensive indeed" (12).

the ESC's attempts to present new plays in repertoire with a resident company. Both George Devine and William Gaskill⁶⁵ soon had to abandon their idealist plans to do so as unrealistic and too costly. The wide range of plays and financial handicaps made a permanent company quite impracticable. The repertory system was soon abandoned "in favour of 'end-to-end' programming for limited runs" (Lacey 53) and possible West End transfers for the more successful productions.

[I]t remains a significant fact that instead of being able to develop as a theatre with a permanent company, in pursuit of a definable and consistent tradition, the Royal Court has become (or forced to become) just a theatre run by the most progressive management in London. (Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 46)

The ESC has never been supported adequately by public funds for its services towards English theatre since 1956. The grants from the Arts Council were not enough to offer Devine the artistic freedom to do whatever he felt right. Furthermore, the Court did not have "an audience, in any age-group, which is ready to support it through thick and thin, to see whatever it puts on" (Lambert 33). As a result, all too often the theatre played to a high proportion of empty seats. Peter Brook states that "[t]he only thing that all forms of theatre have in common is the need for an audience" (127). Especially in relation to the Royal Court which aimed to present new and unknown works it is important to emphasise the need for creation of a new audience in accordance to the development of new drama. "For effort to be creative, response must be creative too. The development of a new kind of ['vital'] theatre [...] is intimately bound up with the development of a new kind of audience" (Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 45)⁶⁶. The Royal Court's supposed broad audience did not exist in the field of 1956 – it had to be created. This is another significant feature which links the institution to Bourdieu's idea of an autonomous pole of restricted production. One of the major goals for Devine, therefore, was to find and train not only new dramatists but also a new kind of audience. In the meantime, before such an audience was found and consequently guaranteed a certain

⁶⁵ Artistic Directors of the Royal Court: George Devine (1956-1965), William Gaskill (1965-1972), Oscar Lewenstein (1972-1975), Nicholas Wright and Robert Kidd (1975-1977).

⁶⁶ Cf. also: "God help the English theatre if this Company dies. But, for such a theatre to survive, there must be an audience which wants it; if there is no such audience, it must be created, and must be kept together by the knowledge that it will get good theatre *all*, and not some, of the time" (Milne *Taking Stock at the Court* 21).

financial security from the box-office, Devine had to manoeuvre his company carefully.

The inevitable gap between box office revenue and Arts Council subsidy has usually been filled, *somehow*, by profits from West End transfers, film rights, etc; by private patrons, fund-raising concerts, charity galas; and – least conspicuously but most persistently – by its own theatre writers, workers and artists. (Findlater 1981: 199)

The Court survived because of the clever managerial pragmatism of agents like Devine or Blond. It accomplished to remain an idealist, autonomous venture on the restricted pole of production. Working at the Royal Court, however, meant you had to be an idealist yourself. The most crucial form of support the ESC received was that from its own people: “Since its first season in 1956, the Royal Court had been subsidized by its playwrights, directors, and actors [...] through their acceptance of low fees and wages” (Doty, and Harbin 21). Even when the temptations were great to move towards financially more rewarding positions in the field, dramatists, directors and actors stayed with the Court – at least over the first years – and contributed to its strong identity. That fact only changed when these temptations increased in symbolic value as well with the establishment of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre.

Wardle points out that there always seemed to be two elements to George Devine’s way of running the ESC: “the long-distance vision of what he wanted, plus the day-to-day politics of keeping the thing afloat” (qtd. in Doty, and Harbin 34). Devine’s directorship was marked by an “obsession with needing to make this theatre work” and “an equal readiness to undergo any humiliation, hard work, wire pulling, administrative juggling, to keep the thing alive” (Doty, and Harbin 34). Devine was thus the first to prove and define what it meant to be artistic director of an English “art” theatre at a time when subsidy was still relatively novel. Gaskill notes that he “saw everything [from] the practical and very rarely [from] the artistic” point of view (qtd. in Doty, and Harbin 36).

However, he had very strong artistic ideologies which guided his actions. Devine was also the first to demand and gain greater autonomy from the Artistic Committee in programming and decision-making. He demanded “the right to choose his own plays without consultation” (Wardle 1978: 214). In 1961 he managed to reduce the executive power and interference of the Board by “shifting decision-making on individual plays towards the Artistic Director and

his Associates” (Little, and McLaughlin 70). This change of management structure is highly significant. Until then, the final say for whatever decisions, artistic or non-artistic, always lay with the higher managerial authorities like the board of governors or the managing companies in the West End. After 1961, at least for the ESC, it was the artistic staff which had the power to decide on individual productions.⁶⁷

4.5.1. Commercial Non-Commercialism

It is quite ironic that by the end of the first run of *Look Back in Anger*, now considered one of the greatest triumphs in 20th century British Drama because it broke with theatrical traditions of the time, “the [English Stage] Company [was] £13,000 in the red and was saved by its Christmas attraction, *The Country Wife* with Joan Plowright and Laurence Harvey” (Hinchliffe 47). Six months after the company was set up it was in danger of bankruptcy. Staging *The Country Wife* represented a cynical decision in relation to the Court’s policy as this play was primarily expected to be financially viable rather than considered artistically worthy. “[I]t was the starrily cast revival of an English classic from the 17th century [...] which, by achieving a transfer to the West End, helped to keep the English Stage Company alive” (Findlater 1981: 27).⁶⁸ In 1958, Tom Milne wrote:

[A] cynic might well be suspicious of the ‘commercial flair’ evident in the presentation of the bawdiness of *Lysistrata* or *The Country Wife* conveniently at the Christmas season, and in the lacing of its casts with such names as Joan Greenwood, Sir Laurence Olivier, Robert Helpmann and Laurence Harvey. (*Taking Stock at the Court* 21)

A degree of commercialism was a pragmatic necessity in order to survive in a commercially dominated field. Devine knew the difficulties of instituting a clearly anti-commercial policy, and he acted accordingly. In order to survive, the ESC “had to subsidize itself by mixing new work with classic revivals, and it had to

⁶⁷ See also: Liebenstein-Kurtz, Ruth Freifrau von. *Das subventionierte englische Theater: Produktionsbedingungen und Auswirkungen auf das moderne englische Drama (1956-1976). Dargestellt am Beispiel der Royal Shakespeare Company, des National Theatre und der English Stage Company*. Tübinger Beiträge zur Anglistik; 2. Tübingen: Narr, 1981.

⁶⁸ However, in the long run it was certainly Osborne who really consolidated the ESC’s survival, both financially and symbolically. After the BBC extract in October 1956, the theatre suddenly became filled with young people, some of them who had never been to a theatre at all before, and *Look Back in Anger* turned into a “box office bonanza” (Findlater 1981: 27). The production was transferred to a larger theatre and brought back for a second run. In the first five years, Osborne’s plays brought the ESC a subsidy of £50,000, an enormous amount compared to the Arts Council’s £30,000 (cf. Findlater 1981: 44). Without the money and prestige earned from Osborne’s success, the Royal Court might not have survived its first years.

get productions transferred to the West End” (Findlater 1981: 27). Without greater support from the Arts Council, which was out of question at that time, even an idealist like Devine needed an audience to back him up through the box-office⁶⁹. That was certainly difficult because the majority of theatregoers “clung on to the old” while only a minority was “intrigued by the new” (cf. Shellard 2008: 70). Affected “by the need to work within the free-market system” (Lacey 52), Devine soon categorised the plays he produced as “star shows”, “normal shows”, and “experimental shows” (cf. Roberts 80). The expensive “right to fail” he needed to provide for his playwrights was paid for by the earnings of a few productions which were primarily staged because they were expected to be successful.⁷⁰ One success brings with itself the symbolic and economic capital which is necessary for further action. Devine adopted the West End’s commercial ways of production not in order to make financial profit for his company but to sponsor the idealist, autonomous theatre which he wanted and which could not otherwise have been possible⁷¹. After all, during Devine’s artistic directorship at the Royal Court, there were only thirteen plays that made money in relation to seventy-five that lost (Doty, and Harbin 67).

In other words, Devine tried to stay on one pole of the field, namely the autonomous pole of restricted production, while the field’s commercial structure continually forced him towards the other direction. Transfers to the West End, star performances and following the broad public’s taste are what Lacey calls an “accommodation [...] to certain financial realities” (51). Devine soon had to acknowledge that in the repertory system, even successful productions could not make as much money as he had needed to support his “experimental shows”. Through a transfer to the West End, however, productions could be

⁶⁹ Cf. Lacey: “The only alternative to West End transfers was a level of State subsidy that was commensurate with the company’s ambitions, and this it never received” (52).

⁷⁰ Cf. also Taylor 1969: Devine had the “ability to pay for the failure of some plays with the success of others, and a clear grasp of the theatre as a commercial venture” (10). Taylor also notes that particularly in the theatre commerce has a great deal to do with art because in the theatre “a large amount of money has to be spent, and a large number of people employed, to bring to fruition a work which began in one man’s brain” (10).

⁷¹ Of course this does not mean he returned to pre-war values and mostly produced the kind of theatre Tynan and himself so heavily criticised. A play which “guarantees” success does not need to be a bad play. Also, even modern plays could be transferred to the West End and support the company further if they were well received and attracted audiences. The best example is, of course, *Look Back in Anger*. Cf. Elsom 1976: “The offshoot income from *Look Back in Anger* (including the film) kept the English Stage Company solvent over the following years, enabling George Devine to tackle ever more ambitious programmes” (Elsom 1976: 81). See also Liebenstein-Kurtz 98-99.

seen by larger audiences over a longer period of time and could make profit. Furthermore, transfers of successful modern productions could influence the viewing habits of the average West End audience – and slowly shape their taste. The “old” audience could get accustomed to the “new” theatre by transfers of pieces previously tested at the Royal Court.

The so-called *pylon system*⁷² of staging popular plays with a star cast in order to finance new, potentially unsuccessful plays has proven to have had one major disadvantage for the ESC: it prevented the Royal Court from establishing a core audience interested in the whole range of work they were producing. Building a permanent audience who would always go to the Court no matter what kind of play they trusted in was Devine’s major goal. However, the success plays soon attracted the regular West End theatregoer who would remain ignorant of and disinterested in the new and actual core work the ESC aimed to produce. Once the permanent company and policy of ‘true’ repertory were discarded at the Court, its audience clearly divided into two camps: those oriented towards the conventional theatre and interested in stars, classics and modern drama which had already entered the canon, and those interested in modern plays, experiments and issues raised by young and unknown dramatists. Unfortunately, the latter were a small, young and intellectual minority⁷³.

The pylon system and the resulting division of the Court’s audience have proven to be a significant feature of the ESC’s standing in the historical memory. Rogoff sums it up as follows:

Quite early in the game, it became clear to all but the most relentlessly journalistic minds that the new plays, fewer than one might imagine, were quite literally being paid for by way of successful star vehicles drawn from the past and present literature of world theatre. [...] It is difficult to think of any theatre with a history quite like the Court’s; one whose reputation and fame rests almost entirely on a body of new plays seen, understood, and admired by only the tiniest fraction of its regular audience. Never has such a small audience carried so few so far. (34)

⁷² Cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 89-90. See also Wardle 1978: “The pylon’ policy developed out of the success of *The Country Wife*. It was a scheme for periodically arresting the headlong flow of untested novelties and bringing in a sober, resplendently cast classical revival which could be anything from Middleton to Shaw, designed to keep the E.S.C. financially afloat by transferring to the West End” (201).

⁷³ See Liebenstein-Kurtz 114-117 for an analysis of the ESC’s audience in the late fifties and sixties.

Devine knew the importance and financial viability of the occasional star performance for his theatre. The Court's growing prestige soon attracted established theatrical figures. In 1957, Devine landed a true coup with an immense effect on the Court's both symbolic and economic capital.

4.6. The Entertainer

Even though the production of *Look Back in Anger* is considered the symbolic explosion of the Royal Court, Osborne's second play, *The Entertainer*, is now regarded more influential and innovative in terms of playwriting. Osborne tackles contemporary politics in a formally innovative way, deals with the Suez Crisis⁷⁴ and uses the fading glamour of music hall as "a metaphor for Britain's own moral and social paralysis, for the loyalty to decaying tradition represented by a 'gloved hand' waving from a 'golden coach'" (Little, and McLaughlin 34, cf. also Andrews 2008). However, even more significant than the play itself was that Laurence Olivier⁷⁵, the greatest actor of the time and "one of the country's leading celebrities" (Shellard 2008: 69) performed in it as the main character Archie Rice. "The king had come to the Court. It was a coup", states Coleman (292), and the production instantly turned into a smash hit for the author, the star and the Royal Court upon its opening on 10 April 1957.

Olivier's commitment to the play – and consequently to the Royal Court and the "angry young" movement – only one year after the ESC's opening is a highly significant instance in the development of the theatrical field. In 1956, Olivier was "at the height of his commercial powers" (Shellard 2008: 69) and yet it was him who approached John Osborne and George Devine. Olivier had seen *Look Back in Anger* in late 1956 and his initial response was only indifferent. However, he saw it again with an enthusiastic Arthur Miller (cf. Little, and McLaughlin 26) and went to see Osborne after the show. Olivier states:

After seeing *Look Back* for the second time I took pains to express my admiration to John Osborne, daring to hope that perhaps it just might occur to him to think of me for some future possibilities. His modest reception of this idea and his obviously brimming enthusiasm for it delighted me in the extreme. But I noticed George [Devine] prick up his

⁷⁴ In July 1956 Egypt nationalises the Suez Canal. A joint Anglo-French force bombards the Suez while Israel attacks from the north. Britain seizes the Canal Zone but is forced to withdraw under US pressure. See Shellard 2007: 141-144.

⁷⁵ Laurence Kerr Olivier, Baron Olivier, OM was born on 22 May 1907 and died on 11 July 1989. Olivier was the first actor to be created a life peer as Baron Olivier in 1970.

ears in a way that I at once recognized meant business. Up to then there had been no expressions of interest by any of the box office names in joining his company, and with his canny sense and wide experience he perceived possibilities for quite a new turn of events. (Findlater 1981: 40)

The Entertainer was an event which bore enormous symbolic profits for all involved: Osborne, Olivier and Devine. Olivier's success and fame meant little to him at the time. He described himself as "feeling frustrated by the boredom of [his] own career" (Olivier 180) and that his "rhythm of work had become a bit deadly" (Findlater 1981: 40). Olivier was, after all, only successful on a heteronomous level, appreciated mostly in the commercial sector of the field and therefore not true to the *illusio* of the real artist. The "real" artists suddenly worked at the Royal Court, Olivier realised, but he also noticed that he "stood for everything that the young generation at the Royal Court would find most objectionable" (Olivier 180). The great star of the West End and Hollywood had reached a dead end and needed to redefine his position in the field:

I was going mad, desperately searching for something suddenly fresh and thrillingly exciting. What I felt to be my image was boring me to death. [...] I could feel in this opportunity a great sea-change, transforming me into something strange. (qtd. in Findlater 1981: 40-41)

For Olivier, approaching Osborne was a "calculated step" (Coleman 296). He considers going to the Court a "great move", especially since he did so far earlier than the other great stars like Gielgud or Richardson. "It's most awfully funny because they followed me and they both offered themselves one after another to the Royal Court. Because they saw, a little later than me, that's all, *that* was the new theatre. [...] There was another newness and we've got to have it" (cf. Coleman 296).

The fact that the greatest theatrical star of the time, and in that way a highly influential mediating authority, perceived that way and showed interest in the institution proves the enormous symbolic impact *Look Back in Anger* had had on the whole field of theatrical production. Equally it shows the symbolic value attributed to the Royal Court. Olivier, "the pre-eminent member of the theatrical establishment" (Shellard 2008: 17), acknowledged that this new theatre was more than a fashion or a mere experiment, that the developments on Sloane Square were crucial and that this was a train he would better not miss. Tynan reads Olivier's request as the "Establishment's first bow to the 'angries'". It meant that they had officially arrived" (*Angry Young Movement* 61). Olivier

himself describes his motivation to approach Osborne “along the lines of ‘if you can’t beat ‘em, join ‘em’” (181).⁷⁶ Besides great publicity for Osborne himself and the advancement of his career, Olivier’s will to appear at the Royal Court naturally offered enormous possibilities to the ESC as well. A star like him would help “to cement the reputation of the new wave” (Shellard 2008: 17), and as *The Entertainer* proved, it did.

If *Look Back in Anger*, Dame Peggy Ashcroft in *The Good Woman of Setzuan* [...], and Joan Plowright and Laurence Harvey in *The Country Wife* had helped put the English Stage Company very firmly on the theatrical map [...] then *The Entertainer* set the seal. (Hallifax 37-38)

Olivier’s “symbolic investment” of his personality and position in Osborne’s play proved a symbolically invaluable step for all involved. One of the highest theatrical authorities of the time moved his position in the artistic landscape from the West End towards Sloane Square.

Furthermore, *The Entertainer* also proved that one of the Royal Court’s central tasks was that of mediation between the avant-garde, i.e. new writing, and the theatrical Establishment. With star performers coming to the Court, as with the production of classics or transfers to the West End, the avant-garde of playwriting was neither simply absorbed into the commercial structure of the West End nor was the ESC necessarily corrupted in its original goals. Rather, the Royal Court contributed to a learning process, symbolic profit and developments on both sides. Only as a mediating institution between the two poles could the Royal Court produce some of the most outstanding and prestigious figures in British theatre, actors, directors and naturally writers (cf. Thomsen 35).

4.7. Conclusion – the Royal Court under George Devine

*You still want to be a revolutionary?
You’ve plenty of time. The party has scarcely started.*⁷⁷

– John Osborne –

At the End of George Devine’s term as artistic director of the English Stage Company, he had produced 86 new English plays and introduced 37 new

⁷⁶ Cf. also Tynan: Olivier approached Osborne “presumably on the principle of joining what you can’t lick” (*Angry Young Movement* 61).

⁷⁷ John Osborne in the *Tribune* in 1959. Qtd. in Osborne 1994: 10.

writers to the London theatre (Little, and McLaughlin 87). By 1958, already, the ESC had accomplished much:

To an extent unknown since the Ibsen riots, it has made drama a matter of public controversy. [...] It has given the modern repertoire a permanent London address. [...] If (and the if is crucial) it can hold its present nucleus of talent together, it may very well change the whole course of English drama. (Tynan *Court Revolution* 182)

The idea, however, that the Royal Court changed the face of British Theatre overnight is fairly romantic:

the old West End power bases remained intact and even at the Court itself the most popular works, aside from *Look Back in Anger* and *The Entertainer*, were by Wycherley (*The Country Wife*), Aristophanes (*Lysistrata*), Ibsen (*Rosmersholm*) and Feydeau/Coward (*Look After Lulu*). You only have to look at the box-office records to realise that there was still no loyal, regular audience in London for new writing. (Billington 2007: 119)

The ESC's autonomy in the field of theatrical production in London of the late fifties was never given as such. The company had to struggle for it, and it had to struggle for it hard. Even with the symbolic breakthrough of *Look Back in Anger* the Royal Court could only gain autonomy from the dominant commercial theatre for itself and the writers it promoted to some extent and only with great sacrifices in terms of staying true to its artistic policy. The ESC, in the immediate years after its establishment in 1956, shows that any institutional rupture with the prevalent order in an artistic field needs to work with several faces and strategies. That is especially true in a field heavily dominated by the pole of large-scale production and heteronomous principles of legitimisation. However, the fact that the Royal Court *was* established and *did* survive proves that the generally understood need for new writing and new institutions also provided possibilities for such in the theatrical field.

The successful formation of the company was certainly due to a clear structural gap in the English theatre which developed quickly after the end of World War Two. Provided with an institutional basis and supported by socially powerful agents in the field, Devine proved to be just the right kind of man, both practical and idealist, to guide a new enterprise to fill this gap. In 1957 already, Tynan notes that "one major hole – the lack of a public theatre with a stated policy for experiment – has been amply filled by the English Stage Company" (*Closing the Gaps* 177). With that gap closed, the field of possibles for new dramatists saw

itself significantly modified and the appearance of new writers, new plays and aesthetics was just a matter of time. The *New Wave* of dramatists, therefore, was equally created by a field-internal demand. In that way, the *Look Back in Anger* phenomenon can be seen as the first outcome in a whole series of changes in the field rather than as the event which first initiated the chain reaction.

[T]he appearance of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* on 8th of May, 1956, at the Royal Court Theatre, London, was to the new move in British theatre as the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand was to the initiation of World War I: it triggered the action, but in itself it was more effect than cause. (Rogoff 30)

This is not to deny that, symbolically and in the historical memory, the production is regarded as the beginning of the movement. With Osborne's play, the Royal Court certainly won one of the most crucial battles in the struggle over the legitimate definition of drama. Consequently, all later developments of new writing in the field were defined in relation to Osborne's historically constructed 'breakthrough' on 8 May 1956.⁷⁸ *Look Back in Anger* certainly altered the possibles in the field for any young writer. This development supports Bourdieu's idea that each new entrant to the artistic arena and his struggle for legitimacy have an influence on the existing field: with the agent's or group's "accession to existence, that is, to difference, the universe of possible options finds itself modified" (1996: 234).

In 1960, Devine himself lamented that what he had not yet achieved was to find the right audience for his theatre: "We haven't really found a way of attracting the sort of audience we want, the LP record audience, the people with curiosity" (qtd. in Little, and McLaughlin 67).⁷⁹ The movement which started at the Royal Court remained "a minority affair, operating within an air that exerts, at best, no more than a minority appeal. The face of the West End has not been lifted overnight [...]" (Tynan *Look Behind the Anger* 200). Even though *Look Back in Anger* was revolutionary, it wasn't a revolution. It gave a clear direction to the institution and started a "theatrical movement" with much attention from the media. Osborne's plays certainly helped to firmly root the Court in the theatrical landscape of London in a new and seemingly revolutionary position. However,

⁷⁸ Cf. Zarhy-Levo 1998: "accepting a new playwright into the canon often implies reshuffling the positions, as it were, of members of the group with which the new playwright is affiliated" (61).

⁷⁹ For Devine's evaluation of the state of the English theatre in 1961 see also: Roberts 82.

one successful production did not guarantee the Court's survival in the long term. In 1961, Tynan notes: "The Royal Court has arrived and survived, a beach-head for our splashing new wave; but one beach-head, it becomes chillingly clear, doesn't make a break-through" (Tynan *Breakthrough That Broke Down* 226). Symbolically, the position the ESC occupied in the field after *Look Back in Anger's* success was far more powerful than in actual terms. Devine couldn't really tackle the dominance of the commercial theatre because his institution was not large enough and his resources restricted. Structurally, the ESC did not accomplish to alter the prevalent order of the field quite yet. To some extent, Devine even played on the old commercial structures and only thus accomplished to create such a unique and firm position in the field for his institution. Rebellato claims that Devine "was not a break with the previous structures, he was a link with them" (66). Devine's manoeuvring of the ESC in the late fifties was both a compromise⁸⁰ and still extraordinary. It certainly laid the groundwork for the later establishment of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre, two heavily subsidised companies which eventually provided a counterbalance to the West End's dominance. Therefore, Devine's and the Royal Court's major achievement, besides establishing a home for new English drama, was paving the way for an equal distribution of power in the field of theatrical production. With *Look Back in Anger* in 1956, an evolution had only just started.

The original plan to create a permanent company and a repertory system had to be abandoned quickly because the ESC did not receive a level of state subsidy which matched the company's original ambition. The Arts Council's grant was not nearly enough to support such a scheme and a permanent repertory company was simply too impractical to be kept running in the pylon system. Lacey argues that the Court's inability to attract a loyal and regular audience was "at root an institutional one; The Royal Court [was] operating in a

⁸⁰ Devine had to find a balance between his original goals and keeping the theatre open. Artistic compromises were inevitable in order to ensure survival but "a considerable impact on the most innovatory elements of the [the company's] artistic policy" (Lacey 51). Cf. also Devine in an Article in *The Guardian* (2 April 1962): "In order to survive we have been forced to participate in the commercial jungle, subject to the normal commercial risks. A 'bad press' and down we go. Apart from about a thousand people there is no regular public to support us through thick and thin. To pave our way we have to achieve 'rave notices'. [...] Goodness knows, we at the Court have become infinitely more 'corrupt' than in our early passionate days. But we wanted to survive, so calculation has been added to conviction and compromise abounds. The sharp point of our endeavour has been somewhat blunted" (qtd. in Liebenstein-Kurtz 98).

metropolitan context, at the fringes of the West End as [a] 'minority' [theatre], and as such could not hope to construct a new audience on [its] own terms" (55). Bill Gaskill followed Devine as artistic Director of the ESC and his term was marked by an equal search for new audiences, heavy struggles with the Lord Chamberlain and the opening of the Theatre Upstairs, a small studio theatre devoted to experimental work. Upon Devine's resignation in 1965, Gaskill acknowledged that "the theatrical climate had changed significantly since Devine took over the theatre in 1956" (Little, and McLaughlin 87).

Devine's heavy struggle with the field between 1956 and 1965 earned the Royal Court a certain monopoly position in the field. The company was singular in its objectives and ways of producing. The experimental fringe theatres and small studios of larger subsidised companies were not yet existent. Consequently, new writers had literally nowhere to go but the Royal Court. This fact, combined with the strong need for new drama at the time, provided for the Court a unique position in the field and contributed to its rapid progress of making a reputation for itself. A combination of such criteria also multiplied the quick effect the Royal Court had on the rest of the field and strengthened the monopoly it carried.

However, soon after the achievements of the Royal Court were generally accepted and a great number of new dramatists firmly established in the theatrical landscape, the great urge for new writing seemed to be nursed by the beginning of the 1960s. For this reason, the first four years of the ESC are considered to have been the most concentrated and most fertile. But the Royal Court Theatre, despite its image, has always been more than a "writer's theatre". It provided a training ground not only for writers but also for a new generation of directors, actors and designers who, eventually, "carried their art into the national theatres, the fringe, the West End, Broadway, and the founding of new companies" (Doty, and Harbin 1). Despite the fact that the playwright was the central creative agent and point of interest at the ESC, practically all great actors or directors of the time were also in some way related to the Royal Court. Thorn argues that the English Stage Company produced or contributed to produce the great majority of all mentionable theatre makers of post-war London (296).

The institution's monopoly and prominence in the field slowly began to fade in the face of competition from the two national theatre companies which started to evolve in the early sixties. For the Royal Court it became increasingly difficult "to maintain the same focus and to keep a group of writers together because [now] the attractions were elsewhere, in [...] the other big subsidies" (Doty, and Harbin 53). Furthermore, due to its insistence on being a playwright's theatre, the ESC's possibilities of 1956 seemed to have faded because by 1960 a concentration on artistic achievement shifted towards the realm of acting and production (cf. Hinchliffe 55). When the first wave of new dramatists hit London, a different kind of theatre was already emerging, one which became to dominate the field of the sixties and seventies: a theatre controlled by the producer. Directors undermined the superiority of the writer and aimed "at total theatre involving the audience by new acting methods, stage and theatre shapes and modern effects of lighting and scenery. The producer, more than the dramatist, recognized what had been happening in Europe and sought a classless, international, democratic kind of theatre" (Hinchliffe 1974: 1).

Excursus II – Producer's Theatre

Today, the word 'producer' in the theatre is commonly associated with management. In the 1950's, however, it was used to describe the agent in charge of artistic direction in a production (cf. Hinchliffe 2). Devine, in his open support for the playwright at the Royal Court and emphasis on the dramatist's centrality in the theatre, managed to attract not only writers but also multiple directors. Producers who made their debuts at the Royal Court were John Dexter, Lindsay Anderson, William Gaskill, and Anthony Page, all of whom were to become prominent agents in the history of British theatre. As much as the Royal Court was a "playwright's theatre", it equally became a training centre for theatrical producers. Findlater states that the Court could achieve its "special identity as a writers' theatre" especially by "[m]arrying an author and a director": Osborne and Richardson, Simpson and Gaskill, Wesker and Dexter, Osborne and Page, Storey and Anderson, Hampton and Kidd, Bond and Gaskill, and so forth.⁸¹ It can be argued that the Royal Court, in fact, wasn't necessarily a "writer's theatre" but merely promoted writers whom certain directors wanted to

⁸¹ Cf. Findlater 1981: 43; Doty, and Harbin 152; Liebenstein-Kurtz 87.

do (cf. Doty, and Harbin 152). These marriages between playwrights and directors proved to be extremely fertile (cf. Wardle 1978: 200) and were continued throughout the sixties and taken into the large subsidised institutions.⁸² The *New Wave* of dramatists was certainly accompanied by a new wave of directors eager to break with established theatrical forms and experiment in different styles and aesthetics. Furthermore, the new plays of the “Angry Youngs” certainly offered more interesting directorial opportunities to young directors than the escapist plays of the immediate post-war years. “After all,” states Tynan, “how many ways are there of directing a tea-party” (Tynan 1964: 32).

The idea of the modern director only took root in England rather late compared to continental Europe. The first to set up his own theatre company in Europe with the goal to create an “organic whole, a complex combination of acting and movement, orchestrated to achieve a symphonic synthesis” was the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen in the 1860s (see Eyre, and Wright 30). His ensemble productions had a great influence on such theatrical agents as Stanislavsky in Russia or Reinhardt in Germany and Austria. With the growing importance and influence of the “art theatres” across Europe, the rise of the stage director and of “producer’s theatre” in Great Britain was only a question of time.⁸³ The closest London ever got to an art theatre before the 1950s was the Court Theatre under Harley Granville Barker and George Bernhard Shaw at the beginning of the century.

The convention of the long run was replaced by a repertory system. [...] The role of the actor manager was replaced by the novel idea of the director who had overall control of the production. This development was pushed to its logical conclusion in the work of Gordon Craig (1872-1966). (Smart 12)

Edward Gordon Craig believed in the director as the prime creator in the theatre who carries an overall conception of a play and leads the rehearsals as well as exploring the text with the cast and blocking the movements on stage (cf. Duff 61). Tynan described Craig as regarding “the playwright [...] a destructive intruder in the theatre, [...] detracting from the person who really ought to be in

⁸² For instance Hall and Pinter at the RSC; Nichols and Blakemore, Dexter and Shaffer at the NT (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 87).

⁸³ Cf. Kershaw 2004: 383. For a more detailed discussion of “producer’s theatre” see Bradby, David, and David Williams. *Directors’ Theatre*. London: Macmillan, 1988; Braun, Edward. *The Director and the Stage*. London: Methuen, 1982.

charge, the director” (qtd. in Thomsen 277). However, most importantly Craig believed in the theatre as a unity in which all artistic elements try to blend (cf. also Brook 39). In his famous work *The Art of the Theatre* Craig writes:

The Art of the Theatre is neither acting nor the play, it is not scene nor dance, but it consists of all the elements of which these things are composed: action, which is the very spirit of acting; words, which are the body of the play; line and colour, which are the very heart of the scene; rhythm, which is the very essence of the dance. (Craig, Edward Gordon 138)

The blending of multiple elements necessarily led to the emergence of the director. The producer, in a creative sense, became the dominant figure in the “polygon of forces” (Hinchliffe 171) and stands in the very centre of the triangle made up of playwright, actor and spectator, serving all three of the factors and helping them to reach an achievement (cf. Selden 99). Craig was a sort of prophet who first brought these ideas to London and had an enormous influence on such theatrical producers as Hall or Brook. The collaborative “ensemble” approach to theatre, however, did not completely take root in Britain until the mid-fifties when it reached London via Brecht, Barrault and Stanislavsky. When it did, however, the glorious days of the actor manager were certainly over and the director now became the dominant force in the theatrical profession (cf. Hinchliffe 172). The tasks of actor and director became increasingly separated and distinguished in the early fifties. Furthermore, “the director’s status could be very high; Tyrone Guthrie and Peter Brook were often as well-known as their leading actors”.⁸⁴ The director has considerable power over a production even as a mere interpreter of the play. In the 1950s, however, that power increased because the director no longer acts as an interpreter alone but becomes a creative original artist himself. “[B]y ‘Producer’s Theatre’”, states Hinchliffe, “we really mean that significant part of recent theatre in which the producer plays a more than usually dominant rôle, in which *interpretation becomes creation*” (172, my emphasis). Peter Brook is certainly the best

⁸⁴ Cf. Rebellato 86. “The director’s authority was defended on the sound theoretical principle that written texts are capable of sustaining a wide range of possible interpretations” (86). Rebellato further states that the director’s authority developed from a need to protect the dramatist’s sovereignty. The director “had a certain status, but it was as a border guard, protecting the playwright from anyone who would challenge their sovereignty. And this is done in the name of preserving and presenting the playwright’s work ‘in itself’, so that nothing can threaten its vital unities, its sense of life” (89).

example for a director “poised uncertainly between interpreter and creator” (Hinchliffe 174) surrounded by an inexplicable aura of creative genius.

Rebellato also points out that, in the fifties, a process of reorganisation and a “retitling of rôles” took place: “The producer became the director, the electrician the lighting designer, the stage designer simply the designer, the stage director the stage manager, and the manager the producer” (83). These apparently superficial changes can indicate much broader transformations in the theatrical profession.

The re-organisation of the theatre as a profession had led to a strong repertory movement, a much weaker touring network, a mixed economy of subsidised and commercial theatre with the balance tilting year by year in favour of the subsidised, an active and sometimes positively anarchic fringe, a more forceful Equity (the actors’ trade union) and some very tentative managements, so frightened of getting their fingers burnt that they wouldn’t warm them by the fire. (Elsom 1976: 7)

Therefore, all the structural changes in the field of London theatre discussed in the further chapters of this thesis are in several ways related to the emergence of the director. The “growing power of the *stage* director was reinforced in the 1960s and 1970s by the rise of the *artistic* director, in charge not only of individual productions but also of the entire programme presented by a theatre” (Kershaw 2004: 384). With the producer as central figure in the field of theatrical production, an “attack on theatrical conditions was inevitable”⁸⁵.

The evolvment of the director was crucial to the frame of possible action for figures such as Peter Hall or Peter Brook.⁸⁶ As a director, Peter Hall, for

⁸⁵ Hinchliffe 190. Hinchliffe notes that “[l]ike the dramatists [...] producers were interested in the relationship between audience and actor”. In its exploration of methods and manners of contemporary theatre and search for more effective ways, the emergence of a producer’s theatre “caused or coincided with two developments: the changing pattern of theatrical activity in Britain and the changing shape of the theatre building itself” (190).

⁸⁶ Cf. Bourdieu on the space of possibles in relation to the director: The “space of possibilities is what causes producers of a particular period to be both situated and dated [...] and relatively autonomous in relation to the direct determinations of the economic and social environment. Thus, for example, in order to understand the choices of contemporary directors (*metteurs en scène*), one cannot be satisfied with relating them to the economic conditions of the theatre, subventions, receipts, or even to the expectations of the public. Rather, one must refer to the entire history of production (since the 1880s, during which time the universe of the *points under discussion* – that is, the constitutive elements of theatrical production about which any director worthy of the name would have to take a position – came into being). This space of possibilities, which transcends individual agents, functions as a kind of system of common reference which causes contemporary directors, even when they do not consciously refer to each other, to be objectively situated in relation to the others, to the extent that they are all interrelated as a function of the same system of intellectual coordinates and points of reference” (1986b: 176-177).

instance, could not have reached the central position in the theatrical field in England at any other point in history but in the mid-twentieth century when the actor manager's roll had diminished in the profession and the stage director became the leading authority in production, and the artistic director in the running of an institution. Often these two, artistic director and stage director, were one and the same person, especially in the subsidised theatres where no commercial management was involved and artistic value was rated above financial profit. In the history of theatre, a situation when a director works under his own management has often proven to be artistically extremely fertile. In the commercial theatre of post-war Britain, that situation was very uncommon. Continental Europe had shown the way but England had suppressed the director as central figure of production and management for a long time because he was seen as "a Fascist beast: to submit to his spell-binding is to risk waking up one morning and finding oneself an Über-Marionette" (Tynan *All Directions* 159). In 1957, Kenneth Tynan, notes:

The producers who have influenced the development of the art of the theatre are those who have worked under their own management, owning their own theatres with their own permanent companies. Antoine, Stanislavsky, Copeau, Jouvet, [...] Reinhardt – it applies to them all. How can a man do his best work in another man's house, spending another man's money? [...] The English director [...] is a tolerated stranger, engaged *ad hoc* and invited only for a strictly limited period. The manager, having chosen the play, casts the director. Ideally, the director should choose the play and then cast the actors. [...] We in England banished our actor-managers [...] and replaced them with speculator-managers, who knew (and know) nothing of direction. Our few director-managers – such as Granville Barker and Nigel Playfair – flourished briefly and left no offspring. At present, we are rich in directors, but our directors are not rich enough; they lack the cash to buy theatre leases. This spring we shall see a crucial new experiment. Peter Hall, until recently the director of productions at the Arts Theatre, is going into management, and will stage a series of plays under his own banner at a West End theatre. If his season prospers, as I hope it will, it may induce potential backers to spend their money more wisely. A good director is a more reliable investment than any management; just as the man who trains a horse is a better tipster than the man who owns it. No greater service to English drama could be performed than to present one gifted director with a permanent roof over his head. (*All Directions* 160)

With producers such as Brook, Hall, Littlewood, Dexter, Anderson and Gaskill British directing in the 1950s "seemed to be undergoing a renaissance to

parallel that of British playwrighting” (Shellard 1999: 96). Hall’s “experiment” proved to be a success and he soon was asked to approach bigger tasks.

5. National Aspirations – the RSC and the National

5.1. In Search for a National Theatre

With the ESC at the Royal Court, the formation of the subsidised theatre sector in London had scarcely started. Towards the end of the 1950s, the final battle which would end the “Hundred and Ten Years’ War”⁸⁷ for the establishment of a National Theatre in Great Britain was approaching. Little had happened since the government had agreed upon a budget to build a National Theatre in 1949. In 1951, Her Majesty the Queen laid a foundation stone for the building which, towards the end of the decade, appeared rather absurd when there was still no company or building in sight and the situation became more and more desperate for advocates hopeful that after 1949, the institution could finally be erected. As the National Theatre was still government and L.C.C. policy and no money was yet released, no artistic director appointed and no company founded, agents from within the profession could do little about it. Otherwise, “[c]ampaigns could have been launched, alternatives could have been considered. As it was, however, the National simply seemed to be sliding lower and lower down the list of priorities” (Elsom, and Tomalin 105). Delays made the business increasingly frustrating and the lonely stone on the South Bank became a symbol for the irony of the situation. British Drama had moved on since 1949, a new generation of theatre practitioners was emerging but the promise they had received from the government lost more and more of its credibility. In 1956, Tynan, once again, reminded the English of that promise: “Seven years have passed” and so far only “[o]ne stone has been regally laid; and that, by mischance, in the wrong place. [...] Must it again be urged that Britain is the only European country with a living theatrical tradition which lacks a national theatre?” (*Payment Deferred* 89). In 1958, Tynan and Richard Findlater, together with *Encore Magazine*, staged a mock funeral at the foundation stone to call attention to the apparent death of a dream⁸⁸. The

⁸⁷ Cf. *Encore Magazine* 12: 2. See Appendix chapter 8.2.

⁸⁸ See Appendix chapter 8.2.

situation was ridiculed and drawn attention to on all possible occasions⁸⁹. The difficulty in the establishment of a National Theatre clearly lay within the bureaucracy and politics behind the case. What it needed, and what it would have needed years earlier, was somebody from within the profession to push the process: an insider, a central figure of the theatrical field with enough symbolic capital to set up the company and get the National Theatre going. But an “insider” was never given the proper authority to act on these terms by the government officials. At the beginning of 1956, Tynan appealed in the *Observer* that “the Executive Committee must at once set about appointing an Artistic Director, a captain for the rocket-ship. He should be a man like Brecht in Berlin or Khedrow in Moscow: a combination of chairman, sage and ball of fire. The type is rare in our theatre” (*Payment Deferred* 91). That type is always rare indeed, but even before *The Entertainer*, Tynan was already explicit that Laurence Olivier would be the best choice for artistic director and that the Old Vic should become the temporary home of the National Theatre until a new building could be completed (cf. Castle 99). Before all that finally happened in 1962, however, another agent in the field, Peter Hall⁹⁰, a Cambridge graduate in his late twenties, had become increasingly powerful and managed to turn a summer festival in Stratford into one of the most notable theatre companies in the world. The metamorphosis of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre into the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1960 had a major influence on the structural conditions of the theatrical field. Necessarily, it coincided with and severely conditioned the establishment of the National Theatre. Peter Hall’s “stock” had risen significantly in the late fifties (cf. Shellard 1999: 96) and his manoeuvres to improve his own and the RSC’s position in the field of theatrical production are highly important. Hall’s plans were backed up by a clear artistic vision and an

⁸⁹ Cf. for instance the entry in “A Cynic’s Glossary of Theatre Terms” by Charles Marowitz: “National Theatre: A plaque, two feet long and three feet wide, which flourished on the South Bank of the Thames for a full ten years” (*Encore* 31: 32); or the ads in *Encore Magazine* for Zwemmers New Bookshop which specialised in new drama and advertised for being “within easy reach of all but the National Theatre” (*Encore* 17: 2), quotes Shakespeare “who foresaw so prophetically the foundation of the National Theatre when he spoke of ‘this precious stone set in a silver sea’” (*Encore* 31: 2) or describes the National Theatre as “a rare vision. Of transparently simple design, it is unique among theaters in that no modifications to the original plan have been required. Its sightlines are the most perfect in the world, as is its fireproofing [...]. It is air-conditioned throughout. The planning of its repertoire is generally agreed to be beyond criticism” (*Encore* 24: 2).

⁹⁰ Sir Peter Reginald Frederick Hall was born on 22 November 1930. He founded and led the Royal Shakespeare Company from 1960-1968 and was artistic director of the National Theatre from 1973-1988. Hall was knighted for his services to the theatre in 1977.

amazing ability to judge the given reality in the field. His sense for what was going on in the London theatre of the late fifties, what possibilities and restrictions were present in the field and what actions had to be taken accordingly was extraordinary.

5.2. Peter Hall and the Royal Shakespeare Company

Peter Hall is the greatest example in England for the emergence of the director as central figure in the theatrical profession. Like the actor managers in earlier times he became a “star in his own right, frequently pictured and feted in the news and leisure media” (Kershaw 2004: 384). Hall’s becoming of “the most influential British theatrical figure of his time” (Kershaw 2004: 384) certainly had to do with that prominent and central standing in the field. The Royal Shakespeare Company he built up in the early 1960s offered “a new prototype of what a Shakespearean company could be – a large-scale ensemble presenting in repertoire a classical and contemporary programme relevant to its society” (Chambers 2004: xi). In contrast to the establishment of the National Theatre, the story of the transformation of the RSC in 1960 is an extremely rapid one. Only three years passed between Hall’s appointment as artistic director and 1963, when a relatively considerable grant was awarded to the company by the Arts Council and the company’s central position in the field therefore acknowledged by the officials. The struggles Hall faced in those three years, however, were immense and his scheme involved great risks. “Finance was the key factor, and in the determination to make his ideas work Hall set out to create an organization with one primary objective in mind – the attainment of a substantial government subsidy” (Addenbrooke xv). Similarly to the ESC, “the first three crucial years of the company’s growth necessitated continual compromise between artistic ideal and economic necessity” (Addenbrooke xv). Hall’s handling of the situation, however, was most remarkable and at the end of the “crucial years”⁹¹, the RSC had not only attained its goal of government subsidy but also shown productions of outstanding artistic quality, had established a company style and built up an excellent permanent ensemble. The following chapter will provide an insight to Hall’s maneuvering at the

⁹¹ See Addenbrooke 42-62.

creation of the RSC and show how “[t]he man, the moment, and the method came together with perfect timing” (Beauman 239).

5.2.1. Habitus and Capital

When Peter Hall was asked in 1958 to take over the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford as artistic director from the 1960 season, he was only twenty seven years old. It was due to a combination of multiple talents that Hall, at such an early age, was able to gain complete control over one of the most established theatrical institutions in England and not only propose but also succeed with his daring and radical plans for the company. Combining “the roles of director-producer [...], impresario, and business administrator with brilliant success” (Addenbrooke 22), Hall had made a name for himself in the profession by the end of the fifties which allowed him to gain that amount of power in the theatrical field at the age of only twenty-nine years.

The process of accumulating that great amount of symbolic capital had to do with the chances Peter Hall was offered in the field of the 1950s, the way he perceived and took them. Graduating from Cambridge in 1953, where Hall had already directed an enormous amount of student productions, Hall went straight on to the Arts Theatre in London⁹². As a student, Hall already showed himself equipped with some talents that later became crucial in the running of the RSC:

Negotiating the student drama jungle was superb training for weathering the vicissitudes of the commercial theatre, and during his twenty student productions, Hall displayed qualities and formed a persona that were to become familiar to those who worked with him at the RSC. He was ambitious [...], could pretend convincingly, easily went over budget, took well-calculated risks and had a huge appetite for work. He enjoyed self-promotion, being in charge and the politics of the theatre. He showed a flair for organisation, was single-minded and usually obtained what he desired with disarming charm.⁹³ (Chambers 2004: 7)

At the Art's Theatre, Peter Hall made a considerable name for himself when he directed the English-language premiere of Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. This

⁹² Hall: „In that period, the London drama critics used to come down [to Cambridge] and review the student productions [...]. I had [...] quite wonderful notices [for my production of Pirandello's *Henry IV*] [...] and as a consequence the Arts Theatre in London read the notice in the *London Times* and said ‘We’ve been cancelled with a play next month, can you come?’ [...] Two weeks after I left Cambridge I was a professional director and I’ve never been anything since.” (2009)

⁹³ Chambers further: “After Cambridge he moved quickly off the treadmill of the regional reps through the short-lived Elizabethan Theatre Company to running things: the Oxford Playhouse, the Arts Theatre, London, [...] and his own company, International Playwrights Theatre” (2004: 7).

production proved to be a major influence on Hall's career and certainly "triggered the invitation to direct at Stratford" (Chambers 2004: 7).

Beauman describes the decision to direct a play like *Waiting for Godot* in London in 1955 as "a typical Hall choice" (cf. 237). *Godot* was certainly daring at the time but it was not without prior reputation. Before it came to London, the play had achieved great success in France and Germany. When Hall took over in Stratford, he successfully continued to introduce to English audiences works which had already attracted attention in other countries (cf. Beauman 237). Hall himself states that he had not known about the play's previous success across continental Europe when he decided to stage it but felt it was significant and that he ought to do it⁹⁴. Like *Look Back in Anger*, the play had been turned down by a great number of West End producers, actors and directors but it was Hall who felt that this was the right moment to do that kind of play for him. Hall's "feel for the game" (cf. Bourdieu 1986b: 189) was right and *Waiting for Godot* brought him incredible symbolic profits.

It was because of *Godot* that I was asked to go to Stratford. In fact, *Godot* has changed my life completely. It brought me a West End production [...], it brought me Stratford, it brought me a kind of position, I suppose, in the profession, when I was twenty seven, twenty eight, to have that kind of opportunity that didn't seem to be possible. I worked at Stratford for two seasons. And then, in 58, I was sounded out whether I would take over Stratford. (Hall 2009)

Waiting for Godot was not an instant success. Quite the contrary, it was considered "a monumental flop as far as the reviews were concerned" when the play first opened in London on 3 August 1955 (Shellard 1999: 43). However, once again it was saved by only a tiny number of influential and enthusiastic critics. Hall states that it was the enthusiasm of "Harold Hobson in the Sunday Times [...]" that saved us. [...] If that [review] had been dreadful I don't think we would have had a chance for people to evaluate it as a human experience". To Hobson, who was "already attuned for the nuances of Absurdist theatre", the

⁹⁴ Cf. Hall 2009: "I found a script on my little desk [...] [that] said '*Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett'. I didn't know the play; I hadn't heard of it, I hadn't been to Paris lately so I hadn't seen it. [...] I won't say I jumped up into the air and said this is *the* play of the mid-century because I didn't but I did think it was extraordinarily honestly written. I mean if you want poetic drama, this is poetic drama."

“the arrival of *Waiting for Godot* was most opportune”⁹⁵. As a result of Hobson’s review, the play “quickly became the talking point of London and then an international success” (Hall 1993: 106).

Waiting for Godot was certainly the first great boost for Hall’s symbolic capital and from 1955 until 1960 his reputation in the field and “multiplicity of talents” (cf. Beauman 237) grew much further. “His reputation was bolstered by having three productions in the West End at the age of twenty-five [...]. Hall was energetic, articulate, pragmatic, successful and becoming increasingly well connected at the apex of the profession. He was the coming man” (Chambers 2004: 7). Hall was soon asked by Anthony Quayle and Glen Byam Shaw to direct the occasional Shakespeare production at Stratford-upon-Avon. Between 1956 and 1959 he staged five plays there and during those years it already became clear that Hall was, in fact, “the ideal man for a renaissance job” (Rogoff 36) which the Stratford company desperately needed.

Hall’s standing in the field of the mid fifties is highly significant. On the one hand, Hall saw himself in grave opposition to the existing conditions in the field when he stated that “our theatre is far too often pre-war, safe and easy going in what it offers and lacking in the stimulation that will attract fresh audiences” (qtd. in Billington 2007: 77). The young generation, he thought, was excluded from what was going on in the theatre and Hall grew increasingly fed up with the dominance of the commercial entrepreneurs. Yet, when Hall was asked to run the Arts Theatre at the age of twenty-four, he “somewhat undermined his thesis about the marginalisation of youth” and was one of the first to acquire a position in the field that actually enabled him to “become an instrument of change” to the prevailing order (cf. Billington 2007: 77). In Bourdieu’s terms, Hall showed the perfect profile to reach an influential position in the established order while relishing an anti-establishment role and breaking with the dominant modes of production. Hall was the first of a new, young kind of theatrical producers and the name he made for himself in the 1950s helped him to get offered and perceive possibilities which would yet take him further to more dominant, more powerful positions in the field.

⁹⁵ Shellard 1999: 43. For a discussion of the critical reaction to *Waiting for Godot* see Shellard 1999: 43-45. For Hobson’s review and Tynan’s reaction which was also supportive see Shellard 2007: 69-72.

5.2.2. The Shakespeare Memorial Theatre before Peter Hall

The history of the Royal Shakespeare Company goes back to 1879 when a “philanthropic Midland brewer, Charles Flower, put his passion for Shakespeare and his money into building the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre beside the river at Stratford-upon-Avon” (Eyre, and Wright 45). When Hall took over the company in 1960, he was quite aware of the company’s long tradition and of the artistic expectations he had to meet as its director. Upon his appointment he noted:

At this moment I think Stratford is the most important theatre in this country, and it has been made so by the work of Tony [Quayle] and Glen [Byam Shaw] in the last ten years. It is a marvellous heritage, and a great responsibility. [...] I would want to be, as Glen knows, not a revolutionary, but someone who wants to carry on a fine tradition in his own terms. (Peter Hall in a letter to Fordham Flower, qtd. in Bauman 233)

As radical as Hall’s changes to the company appeared in 1960 and appear today, they were “evolutionary” rather than “revolutionary”. Hall, even years later, has always considered his work for the RSC in that way (cf. Bauman 233). In fact, many of the plans Peter Hall had for the company already started to develop under Anthony Quayle’s (1948-1956) and Glen Byam Shaw’s directorship (1957-1959). Quayle and Shaw were certainly in pursuit of artistic excellence and innovation but the idea of an ensemble company was still foreign to English theatre at their time (cf. Bauman 200). Both artistic directors worked under the star system and attracted the most famous actors and talented directors Great Britain had to offer. Under Anthony Quayle the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre had replaced the Old Vic as the “foremost classical theatre in the country, attracting ever-increasing audiences and publicity in the process”⁹⁶. In 1949, when the company was still run as a summer festival, Richard Findlater described the Shakespeare Memorial Britain’s “nearest approach to a National Theatre”. “Why not”, he asked, “keep the theatre open throughout the year with a second company playing non-Shakespearian repertory?”⁹⁷ To have a permanent company at the Memorial

⁹⁶ Bauman 197. See also Zarhy-Levo who argues that the period following the break-up of the Old Vic Centre in the late forties was one of “rearrangement on a grand scale in terms of the theatrical/institutional map”. “[L]eading theatrical figures who had previously been involved with [the Old Vic’s] activities [including Laurence Olivier, Ralph Richardson, Michel Saint-Denis, Glen Byam Shaw and George Devine] sought to relocate themselves. [...] Upon its closing, other institutions sought to fill the functions and roles associated with this institution” (2008: 18).

⁹⁷ In the *Tribune* on 25 November 1949, qtd. in Bauman 203.

Theatre, however, was “undesirable and impossible” (Anthony Quayle qtd. in Addenbrooke 19) as Quayle thought the great theatrical stars were essential to a first class performance and Stratford had no hope of keeping them in a company for the whole year because it was financially unrewarding for them and too far away from “the centre of British theatre life”, the West End (qtd. in Addenbrooke 19, cf. Beauman 200).

In the early 1950s, however, Anthony Quayle did want to open a London base for the company producing new works, and the Arts Council welcomed a scheme which would link the Royal Court with the Stratford Memorial Theatre (cf. Findlater 1981: 13). When the National Theatre Bill was passed in 1949, Quayle already knew that Stratford would soon lose its premier position in the field if the company didn’t expand on several levels before the proposed National Theatre of Great Britain would arrive.⁹⁸ However, Quayle did not know how to finance such a scheme because he believed that the theatre should survive without subsidy as it had always done. Quayle thought the Shakespeare Memorial had sufficient funds for what it ought to be doing and refused “to be subject to outside influences and bureaucracy attendant on grants” (qtd. in Beauman 200). Attracting a great amount of stars for only a limited season during the year, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, at that time, was self-supporting (cf. Beauman 200).

Some of Hall’s plans for the changes to the company, therefore, were by no means new or unique. Under Hall’s direction, however, “the RSC was the first major company to succeed in implementing such ideas on a large scale in Britain” (Addenbrooke xv). Hall’s policies were considered radical because no one had ever attempted to enforce such a great amount of structural changes to a perfectly well-running company, all at the same time. But Hall was, once again, ahead of the game when he implemented these changes. Not only did he realise that structural alterations were absolutely crucial for the company’s future because of the way the theatrical landscape had changed in England

⁹⁸ Cf. Quayle: „[The National Theatre] would be well subsidised: actors could live at home in London; they were not confined to a diet of Shakespeare; they could range through the centuries; they could pick their plays from any foreign country they wanted, while we were stuck in Warwickshire like rabbits, growing fur all over us. We had to find a London theatre where we could present every sort of play, then change round and bring our own productions to London. It was too early to know how this would be financed, but it had got to be done or our premier position would very soon be lost” (Quayle 333-334).

over the last decade and was changing with the arrival of the National, he was also convinced he had to achieve them with the help of state subsidy, and he had a plan for how to acquire reasonable grants. The scheme involved immense risks and it took until 1963 that Hall had won the battle for government subsidy.

5.2.3. Hall's Plans in Perspective of the National Theatre

The degree of autonomy of the field [...] varies considerably according to periods and national traditions. It is related to the degree of symbolic capital which has been accumulated over the course of time by the action of successive generations [...]. It is in the name of this collective capital that cultural producers feel the right and the duty to ignore the demands or requirements of temporal powers, and even to combat them by invoking against them their own principles and norms. [...] [L]iberties and daring gestures which would be unreasonable or quite simply unthinkable in another state of the field become [possible and] normal. (Bourdieu, 1996: 220-221)

By the End of the 1950s, the field of English theatre had reached an unprecedented state of tension between the old and the new guard. A young generation of theatre practitioners – dramatists, directors, actors and entrepreneurs – had arrived and started to question the old, prevailing order. In only a few years they had acquired for themselves a large amount of symbolic capital which gave them the power not only to question but also to challenge this order. They perceived structural gaps in the theatrical landscape and felt the necessity to fill them. The possibility to do so was approaching. Since the advent of state subsidy, the field finally bore the potential for a large-scale theatrical institution freed from commercial constraints, a national theatre. Even if such an institution was not yet established, under the right circumstances, and led by the right people, it was possible.

Peter Hall was well aware of the developments, specifications and needs of the theatre in the late fifties, both aesthetic and organisational. Chambers states that his leadership was shaped by “the desire to establish the RSC as a world-class company in ‘the marketplace of Now’” (2004: 56). Hall immediately achieved to create conditions for a new artistic quality by the changes he initially made to the company in 1960. This is significant because those changes were almost exclusively organisational. Peter Brook recalls Peter Hall saying: “There is a certain quality of work that we wish to reach nowadays. This quality

depends on certain conditions. My ambition is to create those conditions and make them available to those who need them" (qtd. in Addenbrooke 83). To achieve those conditions, Hall's actions certainly were *revolutionary*. To Hall, "radicalism meant changing institutions. [He] did believe that institutions like the theatre would improve if they had the right structure. That meant, were necessary, state control and state subsidy" (Fay 83). In order to create new circumstances he constantly re-examined everything in search for new, better solutions. "Anything is possible as long as it serves one constant aim: the creating of conditions which make possible work of a certain quality" (Brook, qtd. in Addenbrooke 83). Hall's organisational rearrangements, therefore, were based exclusively on artistic and aesthetic grounds. Now, what exactly were Hall's plans for the Shakespeare Memorial to create such conditions other than changing its name to Royal Shakespeare Company? Peter Hall recalls in an interview with the author:

If you're twenty-seven and you've got nothing to do except playing for the big marbles, you might as well ask for the moon. See what happens. So, what I asked for was not political, was not economic, it was entirely aesthetic, actually. I thought that Stratford was in a very difficult position, although they didn't seem to realise it. It was clear that within the next four, five years, we would have the beginnings of a National Theatre, and it also seemed to be perfectly clear that if the National Theatre happened and Stratford was at Stratford, Stratford would remain at Stratford as a small repertory company for tourists. Now, and it had two remarkable men, Stratford before me, Anthony Quayle, who was an actor and a director, and Glen Byam Shaw, who was a very good director and a man of the theatre. And they had gradually built up the machinery, the workshops, the wardrobe department... They actually built something which could handle a fact of "You know, let's do five productions this year, let's do twelve productions next year". It was possible. [...] I said [to the Board] that I thought no company of actors at that particular time nor indeed at any particular time can be alive to the past if they are not experiencing the present. So it seemed to me that a real commitment to modern drama was absolutely necessary, if Shakespeare was to be kept alive [...]. The board was extremely puzzled by this, by this young man saying these things. I also said as a consequence we needed a theatre in London [...] and we needed some consistency in the companies. Actors should be in the company for a reasonable period of time [...]. I proposed three years but the actors should have the possibility almost at any time to take six months off. (Hall 2009)

Hall was "passionate for the cause of subsidised, ensemble theatre" (Hall 1993: 200). He knew Stratford quite well even before he worked there and was very keen on the Théâtre National Populaire in Paris, the work of Jean Vilar, Jean-

Louis Barrault and Brecht. Extraordinary work had resulted from their companies (cf. Hall 2009) and Hall was eager to create a comparable institution in England. Quayle and Shaw had begun to create the necessary structural framework and Hall planned to expand the company to a large scale with a second theatre in London and producing not only Shakespeare but also modern plays and experimental work with a permanent ensemble playing in repertoire over the whole year. Well aware of the fact that a National Theatre would arrive sooner or later, Hall knew that the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre would have to become a national institution itself in order to be able to compete. Hall, therefore, put his plans “in historical perspective” (Hall 1993: 147) or, as Bourdieu would state, in relation to the field and all other positions, position-takings and institutions within it. The National Theatre “could well deal a death blow to Stratford if Stratford remained as it was” and without anything but the same resources, the RSC “might quickly wither into no more than a short summer festival for tourists” (Hall 1993: 147).

To achieve the scale Hall intended for the company, substantial government funds were necessary and Hall knew that they would only be granted to the RSC once it had already accomplished the status of a national institution offering the highest quality of British theatre to its audiences. Therefore, he *somehow* had to achieve the size and quality of the company *before* he could even claim state subsidy. And even if he did manage to do so, the RSC couldn’t be sure to receive sufficient grants in the end in order to survive in the long term. Through star-performances and tours around the world, the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre had accumulated reserve funds of over £170,000 by the end of the fifties. Hall also knew that the company would never receive any form of state grant whilst this money existed (cf. Hall 1993: 148). Thus, Hall planned to spend all that money on the company’s expansion at once when he took over in Stratford. Only when he had achieved the scale and reputation as the first true national theatre company of Great Britain, Hall was “in a position to claim large State subsidies and to be removed from the insecurities of commercial theatre altogether” (Elsom 1976: 34).

The new company had to win public subsidy, and to achieve this it had to gamble everything. The Treasury could not be persuaded to grant Stratford a substantial subvention unless it merited an award on both artistic and economic grounds. The measure of the former would require

the company to operate at a level and breath of activity expected of a major ensemble. The measure of the latter would require Stratford's reserves to have disappeared. Hall's idea was to achieve the former through the latter and vice versa. In other words, Stratford would have to become bankrupt in order to receive state aid, but it would go bankrupt by supporting the vastly expanded work of the new company. (Chambers 2004: 9).

Halls strategy to spend all the company's resources in order to win public subsidy was considered by some as an engagement in high stake gambling unprecedented in British Theatre. The gamble was indeed well-calculated, but Hall had powerful opponents in the field strongly against his plans: the old guard.

One of them was Hugh "Binkie" Beaumont, probably still the most influential man of the commercial theatre at that time. Beaumont was also on the Board of Governors in Stratford and, naturally, strongly opposed to Hall's immense plans. He believed that Hall's expansion to London and running a year-round repertory there would ruin the West End: star-actors would be seduced away from the commercial theatre and playwrights would prefer their plays to be staged in the repertory system where they had a safer opportunity to find their audience (cf. Hall 1993: 153). Beaumont resigned from the Board in 1960 because he felt "there was a conflict of interest" (Beauman 240) and subsequently did everything he could to block the RSC's move into the West End (cf. Billington 2007: 134). When Hall wanted to open the London branch, for instance, "[s]uddenly and mysteriously there were no London theatres available for lease" in the entire city (Beauman 240). Hall, knowing that Beaumont deliberately blocked him, only accomplished to acquire the Aldwych by taking advantage of a feud between two brothers, Prince and Emile Littler, who were sworn enemies and both owned theatres in London (see Hall 1993: 154). Hall had to face a huge amount of opposition upon the announcement of his plans for Stratford but managed to deal with it by his "inbuilt strategic skill" (Billington 2007: 134). Billington argues that the RSC's survival in "those precarious early years was based on a combination of artistic vision and political pragmatism" (2007: 134). In 1959, Hall states in the *Sunday Times*: "My plans are very ambitious, and next year is only the beginning. I know I shall receive a good deal of castigation, and I may get a little praise. The one thing that really harms the theatre is to ignore it, so, at the worst, I am hoping for vigorous argument" (Hall 1959:

paragraph 19). The mere fact that Hall, at the age of twenty-nine, was given the power to take complete control of Britain's most important theatre in 1960, spend all its resources and bankrupt it in order to keep it alive on new terms is extra-ordinary. Before anything happened, Hall was already referred to in 1958 as the "youngest theatre tycoon" (Kitchin 162) and he was hailed as a "child of the new era" (Beauman 238). The plans alone were gigantic and made Hall's public profile. His "precious celebrity", states Beauman, "gave him a head start: from the moment he was appointed [artistic director] there was a widespread assumption that his regime would bring excitement and change" (239). Without the support of his governors, however, Hall could not have realised one single one of his plans.

In 1959 the Governors had a clear choice. It was either to continue with Shakespeare at Stratford, finding it increasingly difficult to maintain standards, but showing a small profit which in turn would start to run down. Or of leaving this semi-commercial status, changing to top gear, and going all out for a place among the five or six great Art theatres of the world. We were ripe for this change and the Governors made it... the change meant a complete alteration in our attitudes... we were suddenly asked to forget accepted commercial notions and realise that, in the new world we had chosen, a large annual deficit was part of life. (Fordham Flower qtd. in Addenbrooke 47)

Without the support of Fordham Flower, grandson of the theatre's founder Charles Flower and chairman of the company, Hall could not have succeeded. When Hall presented his plans for the company, Flower answered: "I think you're absolutely mad, but it's very exciting. Let's talk to the governors and get it moving. I'll back you to the hilt"⁹⁹. Similar to George Devine and Neville Blond at the Royal Court, the relationship between Peter Hall and Fordham Flower was immensely important.

Hall and Flower, the Labour meritocrat and the philanthropic Tory businessman, went on to form what became an unlikely yet remarkable partnership, one of the most important in post-war British theatre. The relationship between chair of governors and chief executive [...] is always

⁹⁹ Hall 1993: 149. Cf. Hall 2009: "I put all that [his plans] on the table and much else besides and the Board said: 'You're mad'. And I said: 'Well, you know, if you don't want to do it, it's yours to do what you want with.' They had a little fund, 170.000 pounds which had been the savings of the past and I said: 'Give them to me and let me do it for a year and see what happens.' They said no. The one person who said yes was Fordham Flower, who was the chairman. And I'll never forget it, he said to them: 'I understand that you're, you think you're nervous about spending all our resources, nervous about us taking these risks, and, you know, if you don't want to do it, don't. But [...] take with that my resignation, because I like the idea and I'd like us to try, I'd like us to try and be in advance of things.' So they all decided then that they would do it. If it hadn't been for Fordham Flower, it wouldn't have happened" (2009).

crucial for the health of a theatre. Too much interference by the chair inhibits the creativity of the institution; too little threatens its capacity to endure. (Chambers 2004: 8)

Fordham Flower was also significant in that he envisioned a “gradual reduction in the power of his own role” (Beauman 286) as chairman which offered more and more artistic independence – i.e. autonomy – to Quayle, Hall and subsequently to their successors.

With Flower’s backup, Hall now had the authority to start the game and take the risk. He leased the Aldwych Theater in London, even with no certainty for a subsidy from the Arts Council large enough to keep it open, changed the name of the enterprise to *Royal Shakespeare Company* and set out to build his ensemble. The establishment of a permanent company, a nucleus of actors engaged with the theatre for more than one production, really was the key to Hall’s vision for the RSC and one of his greatest achievements. Hall states that he “like[s] consistency. [...] I think consistency gives some soil to the plant to grow in theatre terms” (2009). Only through working and experimenting with continuity as a group the core of actors and directors could explore new methods of presentation and accomplish to develop a tradition and a style for the company. Hall states:

I think the style of the theatre comes from a group of people working together at a certain place and time and for a certain audience. It produces something which should not be calculated; it should happen organically from the talents of the people concerned. That is why people need to stay together in the theatre. (qtd. in Cook 43)

This is not to deny that Hall broke with Stratford’s tradition of engaging star-actors. In fact, Hall “loved celebrity and believed in star quality, if not the star system. Hall wanted star actors who could play within an ensemble alongside the core company actors” (Chambers 2004: 16). What was unique about Hall’s administration was how he attracted the best actors and convinced them to come to Stratford and stay there for longer than one production, and not as star prominence but as part of the whole ensemble. When Hall worked at the Arts Theatre, he had had a contract which allowed him to go away and direct elsewhere when he was offered a production and then could come back to collect his (“terribly small”) salary when he wasn’t (cf. Hall 2009). There he had learned that “binding” actors and tying them down for a three-year period to one company, possibly one author and outside of London was not the way to attract

experienced and successful actors. Offering them flexible contracts which would allow them to do other work for some time and letting them do modern plays as well as perform in London were some of the keys to Hall's success in building a permanent ensemble¹⁰⁰. Furthermore, it is significant that Hall, with this scheme, firstly set out to win Dame Peggy Ashcroft, one of the foremost stars in London at that time, to join his team. Hall was successful, and because Ashcroft was the first to join him in Stratford, many others followed (cf. Addenbrooke 85, Hall 2009).

Equally important as building up the RSC's permanent acting ensemble was Hall's engagement of a team of resident directors over the early years of the company. The aim to have a permanent ensemble necessarily entails a collaborative approach in which the producer becomes the dominant force in the production process. With an emphasis on a modern approach to Shakespeare's work and on experimental work, the RSC under Hall soon became a company largely dominated by the figure of the director (cf. Addenbrooke 93). In 1962, Hall invited two innovators to join him: Peter Brook and Michel Saint-Denis. In the person of Brook, states Hall, he had one of the "young tigers of the present" with him "who was constantly questioning, constantly pushing to new areas" (2009). Brook had acquired astounding prominence in the field for quite some time but certainly was one crucial figurehead of the young generation. In 1946 and at the age of twenty, already, Peter Brook was being acclaimed "a genius and a brilliant innovator by theatre critics and audiences" (Addenbrooke 54). Saint-Denis, on the other side, was a "highly talented practitioner who has held [...] many influential positions in key theatre establishments" (Shellard 2008: 94). Chambers calls Brook the "link with the Stratford forerunners of the RSC" and Saint-Denis the "bridge to a rich European tradition going back to the 1920s"¹⁰¹. Brook and Saint-Denis did studio work and were not obliged to always present it in a public performance.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Hall 1968: "Six years of trying it make me think that the only way you'll get actors to stay in a permanent company, in our western society, is by letting them go. Then they come back. [...] I am convinced that only by letting them go will they really stay, and you've just got to face it. The big money and the acclaim of the outside world is something which is attractive to an actor's temperament" (154).

¹⁰¹ 1980: 21. This "rich European tradition" included "his own Compagnie des Quinze of acrobatic pioneers, the London Theatre Studio, the Old Vic and its post-war theatre school, and leading personalities like Tyrone Guthrie, George Devine, John Gielgud, and Laurence Olivier" (Chambers 1980: 21). Saint-Denis founded the RSC's Actors Studio when he joined the Company which later developed into *The Other Place*.

Saint-Denis' workshop for actors, directors, writers and designers became integral to the Company. Studio work was used to reconsider Shakespeare's verse and look for ways of revealing it to a modern audience. This was one of the most prominent achievements of Hall's RSC in the 1960s.

Besides Hall and Brook themselves, John Barton, Trevor Nunn and Clifford Williams soon became the dominant directors of the company and leading figures in the profession as a whole. Hall accomplished to bring together a vast number of extraordinary creative spirits and engage them to the company. As a result, the work they produced was remarkable. In 1967, Day-Lewis states "Mr Hall, as an outstanding ideas man, psychologist and politician, has a remarkable skill for gathering other ideas men about him" (qtd. in Liebenstein-Kurtz 58).

5.2.4. De Facto National Theatre

When Peter Hall formally took charge in Stratford in early 1960 and initiated his grand changes to the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre¹⁰², the negotiations for a National Theatre in London had still produced no material results. It soon became clear that Hall had set out to create a national theatre himself. The dimensions of the new company, at least, were immense:

Suddenly there were two theatres instead of one; instead of five annual productions at Stratford there were now six, plus a further eight or nine at the Aldwych; where there had been one company of around sixty actors there were now two, totalling over one hundred. All this put an immense strain not only on the company's financial resources, but on its actors, stage staff, and managerial team. (Beauman 242)

"Stratford", states Chambers, "had always seen itself as emblematic of England" and had enjoyed "national status since being granted a Royal Charter in 1925" (2004: 166). With the Queen as Patron, the company virtually belonged and belongs to the nation. Hall's ambitious plans, however, put the company in direct competition with the scheme for a National Theatre that had been pursued for over one hundred years (cf. Kavanagh Fearon 111). In 1958 Olivier had become a trustee of the National Theatre and had begun to lobby intensively for its creation. By 1960, it was clear that the National Theater would finally arrive within a few years and that Olivier would certainly be appointed its first artistic director. Hall, however, knew that he had to be quick and forestall

¹⁰² The *Royal Shakespeare Company* was formally established on 20 March 1961.

the establishment of the National Theatre: “If the RSC was slow to expand, and a National Theatre company began work *before* Hall could launch his London operation, then the whole viability of his schemes would be threatened, and the likelihood of a future subsidy diminished” (Beauman 242). While Hall thought the government should and could subsidise two national theatres, Olivier didn’t (cf. Hall 1993: 202) and soon “went for Hall’s throat”¹⁰³. In 1959, negotiations for the possibility of amalgamation had taken place between the two institutions (cf. Kavanagh Fearon 111) and the idea came up again several times in the decades to come. Hall, however, decided to pursue his own path. When the RSC opened its London base at the Aldwych with a performance of *The Duchess of Malfi* on 15 December 1960, Peter Hall demonstrated that he had made a national theatre practicable.¹⁰⁴ “If the National Theatre Company was the *de jure* national, the Royal Shakespeare Company could regard itself as being the *de facto* one” (Elsom 1976: 161).

5.2.5. 1962 – The Battle over London

The year 1962 was a key one in the RSC’s struggle to take a firm root within the artistic field as one of the two major theatrical institutions in Great Britain. It was the year in which the company was under immense pressure and was finally promised its first subsidy. It was also the time “when it found the style that was to characterize its best work under Hall’s directorship” (Beauman 248). In 1962, Hall expanded the RSC further and started an experimental season at the Arts

¹⁰³ Coleman 339. Laurence Olivier in a letter to Peter Hall in January 1960: “The trouble as I see it (and have from the beginnings of your schemes) is that you have really set out to be a Nat. Th. yourself, or if you prefer it, for Stratford to develop a position for itself as heir to the throne, or else to make such a throne unnecessary... The trouble is that there has been for many years an organisation and machinery (no, not empowered) but recognised and dedicated to the construction of the thing [the joint council, Lord Chandos and Olivier himself]. And you can’t kick them out. These boys have been working at it for years, long before Stratford ever thought of it. So Stratford must now (we think) join in to survive... You really musn’t [sic] throw up words like “Empire” to me, not you with Stratford, Aldwych, and now the Arts, because here again you seem to be assuming N.T. responsibilities” (qtd. in Coleman 339).

¹⁰⁴ Compare an article in the *New Statesman* on 24 December 1960: “The first night of *The Duchess of Malfi* at the Aldwych ought to have been the first night of the National Theatre. Mr. Peter Hall has nailed a ghost that has beckoned and mocked every theatre celebrant since Garrick: the idea of pure theatre, playing its ancient and modern, John Webster and John Whiting, its Shakespeare and its continent, removed from the smash-hit and grab of the box-offices, with its style, its identity. Style is an irritating, immense word, without a leg to stand on, until it is seen – the Moscow Art, the early Abbey, the Berliner Ensemble. When seen, style is as clearly recognised as Mr. Macmillan’s face. Indeed, Mr. Macmillan is the man to watch, for within his nod this month is the provision for the National Theatre. This is so important to the arts in Britain that it can only be compared to the foundation of the National Gallery” (Craig, H.A.L. *Miracle of Pity*).

Theatre in London in addition to the Aldwych. Hall spent all his efforts on building a team of actors and directors which would appear “to be nothing less than a national theatre company, in fact if not in theory” (Pearson 3). By 1962, the RSC had been turned into the “biggest single theatre venture in the world” (cf. Chambers 2004: 20) and was seriously operating on a level which could easily compete with the national theatres across Europe. The “RSC empire” (Chambers 2004: 20) consisted of three permanent theatres (Stratford, Aldwych and the Arts Theatre), had two transferred plays running in the West End, embraced a small-scale tour to mainland Europe and a large-scale tour of the UK. The company of actors and staff numbered almost 500 and “presented twenty-four productions in an unprecedented range of classical and contemporary work to some 700,000 people” (cf. Chambers 2004: 20). Furthermore, Hall achieved to match the company’s scale with productions of outstanding artistic quality. Without such crucial successes as Hall’s *The Wars of the Roses* or Brook’s *King Lear*, the RSC would not have been able to justify the new scale of the company and win the support of the public and the media. These productions “received the kind of acclaim that cannot be argued with; and success breeds success”, states Hall (1993: 205). The size and output of the company soon justified its need for greater resources. Hall’s plan was prospering but the struggle was not yet won. The RSC had still not accomplished to receive support from the state and had, therefore, not yet achieved complete legitimacy as a *national* theatre. “Gaining public subsidy”, states Chambers, “was a necessary affirmation of public legitimacy, and one that reached beyond the merely economic” (Chambers 2004: 165). Wardle argues:

One might have expected that [the work of the RSC which greatly strengthened British theatrical prestige abroad], at least, would have won the organization official support, but the official attitude from the start has been inflexibly unwelcoming. No matter what the achievements of the company and its influence on the rest of the theatre, the Treasury has persisted in treating it as an anomalous luxury. Before the foundation of the National Theatre it was regarded as a wasteful distraction from the main task [...]. (1966: 110)

The “main task”, some considered, was still the establishment of the rightful National Theatre. Hall recalls:

In 1962 and 1963 the RSC hit wonderful artistic form in Stratford and at the Aldwych. This greatly aggravated the anxieties of the National Theatre lobby. The prospect of competition increasingly scared many of them [...] and they clearly wanted us out of London. Our attempts to gain subsidy were frustrated at every turn. The times were dangerous. (1993: 204)

The state was not prepared to award Stratford a subsidy because they were, in fact, “creating a National Theatre [when they] hadn’t been asked to be a National Theatre”, as Hall states in an interview (Addenbrooke 238). By 1962, the reserve funds from Stratford were exhausted and the RSC was on the verge of bankruptcy. The months between July and November 1962 were extremely uncertain for the company. After only six months of operation, the Arts Theatre experiment had to be closed and, without a considerable subsidy, the Aldwych would soon be doomed to follow. Desperate not to return all company activities to Stratford, the RSC started a massive press campaign to win public support.¹⁰⁵

Hall was sure that “nearly all the press [was] strongly on [their] side”¹⁰⁶. The tenor of the campaign was quite uniform and, as Hall imagined, very favourable to the RSC. Croasdell states in the *Daily Telegraph* on 11 July 1962:

It would indeed be a disaster if the arrival of the National Theatre were to be preceded by the loss of the London operations of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre. [...] Competition between companies is invaluable artistically and theatrical experience shows that economic benefits are likely to follow. The removal of the competitor [...] would not benefit the National Theatre but harm it.¹⁰⁷

Tynan also wrote “I beg the Arts Council to remember that nothing is more likely to get the best out of a National Theatre than a subsidized competitor” and the *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald* stated: “We have now reached the moment of truth

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Addenbrooke 49-50. For a discussion of the 1962 press campaign see also Hall 1993: 204-205 and Beauman 260-265

¹⁰⁶ Hall in a memo to Flower on 6 July 1962 about the campaign in the press: “Nearly all the press is strongly on our side, and while retaining an official silence for the moment, this campaign obviously must be fostered in every possible way during the next three or four weeks. All this is preparing the ground very well for our announcement of our definite withdrawal from the Arts [Theatre season of experimental work] which we plan to make in a month’s time, and which should be shown as the first stage in our shrinking future. This will make very good news after what has happened already. Various critics have offered to take up our cause. Findlater is trying to organise something in the *Observer*, and Worsley is trying to organise a letter to *The Times* signed by all the major critics. All this will be fostered” (qtd. in Fay 183). Fay states that “[i]n his theatre, Hall was an impresario; when fighting those who would close it, he was a general, so determined to win that the end always justified the means. Hall’s reputation for ruthlessness stems from Machiavellian memos like this” (183).

¹⁰⁷ Croasdell, Gerald. “National Theatre and its Rival: Value of Competition.” *Daily Telegraph* 11 July 1962.

[...]. If the Arts Council allows the London side of the organisation to die, then the Royal Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon will be near to its own death-bed".¹⁰⁸ It was clear that both, the future existence of the RSC and the establishment of the National Theatre were now heavily dependent on each other. The NT lobby might have preferred if the RSC had stayed the summer festival in Stratford it used to be, but now that it had arrived in London and accomplished the scale and reputation of a national institution, they could not ignore it anymore. An "artistic battle of giants" was approaching:

If the Stratford Company is allowed to maintain its foothold in London, and therefore continue as the most powerful dramatic organisation in contemporary British Theatre, the first director of the new National Theatre has the task of founding a company that must at least equal the most recent triumphs of the Royal Shakespeare. Does this mean that we are to see an artistic battle of the giants?— Olivier with his tremendous international prestige, undoubted experience and great technical ability, pitted against Peter Hall (and his lieutenants Saint-Denis and Brook). [...] In three years the Stratford Organisation has been built into something which now glimmers with potential greatness of a kind rarely seen in theatre. [...] At the moment the real question is: Will Stratford be allowed to grow and prosper? Despite denials, it looks as though the Government — with its endless financial procrastination — is frightened of the outcome of letting Olivier's team into the same field as that of Peter Hall. [...] If the artistic clash, between the National Theatre and Stratford, is allowed to come it will undoubtedly make for the most exciting theatre this country has ever seen. But the clash will not come unless the already thriving Stratford Organisation is given a financial injection relatively comparable with the immense subsidy that is to back the National Theatre.¹⁰⁹

The RSC has never received subsidies "relatively comparable" with those of the National Theatre.¹¹⁰ However, their press campaign proved successful and in late October 1962 it was announced that the company was to be given the sum of £47,000 for the 1963-64 season. The award of the subsidy was "accompanied by a Treasury qualification to the effect that though the RSC might choose to operate on 'a National Theatre level', it must clearly understand that this would not guarantee it subsidy on that level" (Beauman 263). Thus the battle for state subsidy was finally won. "Our gamble had paid off", states Hall, "grant-aided existence had begun" (1993: 170). The following year, the National

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Anonymous. "Towards Valhalla?" *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald* 13 July 1962. Tynan is also quoted from this article. Cf. also Tynan, Kathleen 216.

¹⁰⁹ Anonymous. "Battle of theatre giants?" *Stratford-upon-Avon Herald* 17 Aug. 1962.

¹¹⁰ See Liebenstein-Kurtz 68-69 for the financial situation of the RSC and NT in the 1960s and for the disparity in subsidy between the two institutions.

Theatre of Great Britain opened its first season at the Old Vic with a subsidy five times as large (cf. Beauman 265).

In those early years of the 1960s, the amount of money the Treasury awarded to the theatre as a whole profession increased significantly. Elsom states that the Arts Council “had become a victim of its own success. The expectations of all arts activities had greatly increased and having created this demand, it was up to the Arts Council [...] to meet it” (1976: 129). This increase, especially in the theatre, was closely related to the developments within the field surrounding the establishment of a National Theatre and the RSC’s struggle for survival. The summer of 1962 was the most critical stage in the theatre’s struggle over financial support from the state¹¹¹ which heavily influenced the whole structure and potentialities of the field thereafter. The RSC, literally, forced a grant out of the Arts Council by gaining legitimacy as a national institution through the scale of the company and high quality output it produced. 1962 was the year

in which British theatre was carved up, to be dominated thereafter by two major subsidized companies; it was the year the Arts Council began its evolution from tiny department to dispenser of millions of pounds of grant aid; it was the year in which the future scale of the National Theatre was determined [...]; in which the disparity in subsidy and salaries between those two organizations was laid down, and their position of (comparative) centralized affluence established. (Beauman 252)

The first three years of the RSC were heavily dominated by financial problems and theatre politics but they were also “the years in which [Hall’s] project took on a definite shape and identity, and the RSC began to achieve recognition as one of the most imaginative and creative artistic enterprises in Britain” (Addenbrooke 51). Chambers states that, as often in the RSC, “the acute crises in which it found itself shaped the most astonishing theatrical responses” (2004: 33) and Hall agrees that, even if the pressure from the media was the main reason for the Arts Council’s approval to grant the RSC a subsidy, “unless the work we were doing had justified it, it would not have happened” (Hall 1993: 205).

¹¹¹ See Howard Becker on the role of the state in the collaborative artistic process: “The state [...] acts like other art world participants, providing opportunities to get art work done by giving support both directly and indirectly for what it approves of, and, acting as a constraint on their activities by preventing access, for works deemed unsatisfactory, to some of the facilities ordinarily available to all participants. Thus, the state may prevent works from being distributed (the most usual form of intervention) or from continuing to exist [...]. In this sense, all artists depend on the state and their work embodies that dependence” (1982: 191).

The RSC's struggles over the first years of its existence, these "early bursts of rebellion", as Chambers calls them, certainly "helped [the company] build its image as unstuffy and even radical" (2004: 44). Furthermore, the work they produced became increasingly provocative (not just "*theatrically* provocative" but also "*politically* provocative") and the company developed "a radical identity which could be seen in every aspect of its existence"¹¹². Protected by the support of his company, the public and the media, Hall forced his anti-establishment roll, never compromised (until 1966, which he considers his "biggest mistake" [see 1993: 207]) or worried about making enemies in the Arts Council or the Lord Chamberlain's office (cf. Fay 223). The RSC soon developed an image of youthfulness and vitality, supported by a new and unconventional method to approach Shakespeare and resulting in the gradual change in the structure of the company's audience (see Addenbrooke 111). It is one of Hall's greatest achievements that he managed to attract a much younger age group into the theatre and reduce the dominance of tourists in the RSC's audience. In the early years of the company, the RSC certainly established an *avant-garde* identity¹¹³, however, Hall wanted to run a popular theatre, "socially, as well as artistically, open" and attract "people who have never been to the theatre (particularly the young)" rather than a small, middle-class elite (qtd. in Liebenstein-Kurtz 24). Having secured public funding, Hall now concentrated on the public face of the company. "[H]e knew he had to secure public legitimacy. He tackled this on several fronts and saw it as an integral part of the RSC's contribution to the building of a modern and more democratic society"¹¹⁴.

5.2.6. Conclusion – the Royal Shakespeare Company

Looking upon Peter Hall's plans for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in retrospect, Peter Brook describes them as

¹¹² cf. Beauman 273. For the escalation of the situation following the *Theatre of Cruelty* experiments in 1964 see Beauman 273-279.

¹¹³ For a discussion of the RSC's legitimisation as "avant-garde theatre" through experimental productions such as Peter Brook's *US* see Liebenstein-Kurtz 200-203: "Mit *US* erwies sich die RSC [...] als Avant-Garde des englischen Theaters – eine Funktion, die später zum großen Teil der Fringe übernahm" (203).

¹¹⁴ Chambers 2004: 41-42. Chambers further: "Alongside skilful use of the media, the RSC had overhauled its image in 1963 and given visual coherence to its publicity and published material. New graphics and typefaces and the swan logo featured against bright yellow, evoking the gold of Shakespeare's family colours. Free cast lists were introduced alongside redesigned and more attractive programmes dedicated to each production".

radical and creative [...]. [B]efore the structure was ready [Hall] opened his grand project: [...] He was trying to create a living organism, where flexible imaginative conditions were related to flexible imaginative individuals in key positions. The new traditions of the new company were intelligence, youth and skill. [...] [Hall] calculated daringly, yet wisely, that unless his grand project was realized completely, the theatre would inevitably stagnate, and so it was better to spend the last penny today than save something for a future that would not be worth inheriting [...] a great deal of exciting and costly activity was the first constant on which he relied.¹¹⁵

The fact that Hall achieved to succeed with his vision is highly significant, especially since he had no large prestige in the profession to build upon. When Hall was appointed artistic director of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre he was only twenty-nine years old and did by far not possess the settled reputation of Laurence Olivier, for example. The position Hall occupied in the field of the late fifties, however, and the role he played as one of the leading directors and impresarios of the young theatrical generation were unique. The symbolic capital he gained from his student productions, the English-language premiere of *Waiting for Godot* and his subsequent successes at Stratford and in the West End were highly important. The people richest in various forms of capital are the first to head for new positions.

The strategies of the agents and institutions that are engaged in literary struggles, that is, their position-takings (either specific, e.g. stylistic, or not, e.g. political or ethical), depend on the *position* they occupy in the structure of the field, that is, on the distribution of specific symbolic capital, institutionalized or not ('celebrity' or recognition) and, through the mediation of the dispositions constituting their habitus (which are relatively autonomous with respect to their position), on the degree to which it is in their interest to preserve or transform the structure of this distribution and thus to perpetuate or subvert the existing rules of the game. But, through the stakes of the struggle between the dominants and the challengers – the questions over which they confront each other – these strategies also depend on the state of the legitimate problematic, that is, the space of possibilities inherited from previous struggles, which tends to define the space of possible position-takings and thus orient the search for solutions and, as a result, the evolution of production. (Bourdieu 1986b: 183-184)

Hall clearly perceived the need for developments in the company, and the possibility to realise them in the given structure of the field, like few others would have done. As Devine and Osborne, he "arrived on the scene at the right

¹¹⁵ Brook, Peter: "Peter Hall". R.S.C. Annual Report 1968. Qtd. in Chambers 2004: 56; Elsom, and Tomalin 119.

time” (Peggy Ashcroft in an interview with David Addenbrooke, Addenbrooke 195). Furthermore, he was ambitious and found ways to make his vision for the RSC practical: Hall’s company was animated by ideas but always pragmatic.¹¹⁶ By offering flexible contracts to his actors he allowed them to take on work elsewhere and thus managed to win some of the most experienced and famous theatrical figures for his permanent ensemble. By opening a London branch at the Aldwych he won presence in the West End. By creating a company the size and quality of a national theatre he literally forced the Arts Council to grant the RSC a substantial annual subsidy. The struggle Hall engaged in was immense and entailed great risks. His maneuvering of the situation, however, was extraordinary. Consciously or unconsciously, Hall commanded the rules of the game like few others in his time. His design of the modern RSC enormously influenced the field of British theatre and his work as an impresario even overshadows his work as a stage director. Hall’s most crucial quality besides being an outstanding administrator and excellent director was his awareness of the logic of the field.

With the RSC Hall had created something that “had a vitality and a will to grow which was unstoppable. It was clearly the right idea at the right time” (Hall 1993: 159). Like Devine at the ESC, Hall developed a method that allowed a large degree of experiment, therefore granted autonomy to the artist. “The big hits support[ed] the minority attractions: Shakespeare finances Brecht” (Pearson 3). On an institutional level, however, Hall was more daring than Devine. He consciously bankrupted the company in order to accomplish a larger scale, in fact the scale of a national theatre. Hall was the first to realise it was not enough to create a certain space for new action within the old constraints but that the whole system and nature of theatrical institutions had to be, and now could be, challenged. A theatrical revolution is in need of new relationships between audiences, institutions and economic realities (cf. Lacey 59). While the Royal Court certainly served its purpose but didn’t change the theatrical system overall, Hall literally forced radical change upon the old structures of arts funding, i.e. “both the strictures of the free market and the lukewarm patronage of the State” (Lacey 61). Like the Royal Court in its beginnings, the RSC

¹¹⁶ Cf. Chambers 2004: xiii. Peter Hall was “neither part of the fusty ‘old boy network’ that ran the arts nor the commercial theatre’s ruling elite”. He was “very un-English in his celebrity and upstart habit of public noise making” (2004: xiii).

emerged from the art-theatre movement across Europe and challenged “the values and organization of the dominant commercial theatre” (Chambers 2004: 168). Aiming to establish a repertory company, both the ESC and the RSC wanted to find and educate new audiences to accept and appreciate that kind of theatre the company believed in, and not that which the existing audience expected to see. With his ensemble philosophy, Hall had broken the competitive star system of the 1950s. He established a permanent national company with a strong identity both for its public and for itself.¹¹⁷ Public legitimacy was achieved through artistic excellence and a forceful backup from the media.

In 1962, *Encore Magazine* wrote: “If, in years to come, someone wanted to write a potted history of the British theatre in the sixties, he might short-cut his labour by chronicling the activities of Peter Hall” (*View from the Gods* 38 9.4: 8). This shows Hall’s incredibly dominant standing in the theatre of the early sixties. Within only a few years after the premiere of *Godot* in 1955, Hall had reached a central position in the field. This was largely due to an incredible sense of foreseeing new developments, hierarchies and structures. Had he started only a couple of years later with the restructuring of the RSC, or acted any slower than he did, he might not have been able to forestall the establishment of the National Theatre, and then the modern RSC might never have happened. People with that sense of social orientation and foreseeing new hierarchies, states Bourdieu, are always the ones who “head for the most exposed outposts of the avant-garde and towards investments which are the riskiest because they are ahead of demand, but which are very often also the most viable symbolically and in the long run, at least for the first investors” (Bourdieu, 1996: 262). As this is applicable to the writer, this is certainly also true for the (artistic) director who creates conditions and a framework for artists to work within. The trajectory of Hall’s position in the field is the best proof. “The only thing I have achieved”, states Hall, “is the *possibility* of doing something” (*Tis Pity* 10).

¹¹⁷ However, as Chambers argues, the “artistic and democratic thrust of the ensemble’s egalitarian ‘collective exploration’, in achieving new successes, gave rise to new stars and new distinctions of status within the Company” (cf. 1980: 15-16).

5.3. At Last – The National Theatre of Great Britain

In 1962 a National Theatre Board was finally established and the erection of a purpose-built theatre on the South Bank was agreed upon.¹¹⁸ In August of that same year Laurence Olivier was appointed the first artistic director of the National Theatre. It was decided not to wait with the formation of a company until the new theatre would be completed and that the Old Vic should become the temporary home of the National.¹¹⁹ In the autumn of 1962, upon the announcement that a National Theatre was finally to be built, an article appeared in the magazine *Drama* titled “At Last”. It describes the long struggle for the institution as “not so much against counter-argument as against public inertia, which can be the hardest kind of opposition to combat” (Brown *At Last* 17). The first performance of Great Britain’s National Theatre Company was *Hamlet* directed by Laurence Olivier with Peter O’Toole in the leading role. It took place at the Old Vic on 22 October 1963. Each and every performance of the first seven week cycle was sold out and this speaks clearly for the great urge London had for such an institution (cf. Thorn 71).

5.3.1. Laurence Olivier as the first Artistic Director of the NT

The fact that Laurence Olivier was appointed the first artistic director of the National Theatre might appear evident but is still highly significant. *Drama* described him as “the obvious, and indeed the perfect, choice” (Brown *At Last* 17). What the NT movement had always lacked was a symbolic leader from within the profession, the kind of figurehead rich in symbolic capital and

¹¹⁸ Due to the complexity of the subject this diploma thesis does not go into detail about the interminable political processes behind the establishment of a National Theatre. Without the support of such agents as Jennie Lee, Olivier Lyttelton, Lord Cottesloe, Lord Goodman, Isaac Hayward or Hugh Jenkins the National Theatre might not have happened. For a brief summary of the NT campaigns and politics see Lewis 11-13 and Findlater, Richard. “The Road to King’s Reach”. 1977. *National Theatre Homepage*. 6 May 2009 <<http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=9149>>. For more extensive discussions see Elsom, John, and Nicholas Tomalin. *The History of the National Theatre*. London: J. Cape, 1978; Lewis, Peter. *The National: A Dream Made Concrete*. London: Methuen, 1990. See also Olivier’s and Hall’s account on the history of the NT: Olivier, Laurence. *Confessions of an Actor*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982; Hall, Peter. *Peter Hall’s Diaries: The Story of a Dramatic Battle*. Ed. John Goodwin. 1983. London: Oberon, 2000. For a brief year by year overview of the National Theatre’s history from the movement’s beginnings in 1848 until 1997 see Mayhew, Michael, Lyn Haill and Stephen Wood (Eds.). *Stage by Stage: The Development of the National Theatre 1848 to 1997*. London: National Theatre Publications, 1998.

¹¹⁹ Denys Lasdun was appointed as architect for the new building. The decision to form the company before the building was ready turned out to be very wise. Few people would have imagined it would take yet another fourteen years before the £16 million building on the South Bank could open in 1976 (cf. Goodwin 19).

powerful enough to achieve public acceptance of the institution. As a theatrical figure, Olivier was larger than life. Eyre argues that he was probably the last great actor-manager, equally successful as a Hollywood star and theatre actor, celebrated and glorified by the public and making his life-style a work of art by itself (cf. 1993: 118). Olivier's subscription to the cause of the National Theatre was a "crucial impetus for the project" (Shellard 1999: 101). His "chief apparent contribution", states Wardle, was "that of a commandingly paternal figure who inspire[d] strong company loyalty; and, of course, as the greatest English-speaking actor within living memory" (1966: 113). Laurence Olivier was the only agent in the theatrical field of the late fifties in London, besides John Gielgud possibly, whose reputation alone could help to finally bring the National Theatre into existence and achieve public legitimacy for it (cf. Elsom 1976: 165). In 1962, an article in the *Stage* advertised the post of the National's first artistic director as follows:

The chosen man or woman must be someone commanding the loyalty of the entire theatrical profession. The leader of the National Theatre needs qualities akin to those which have made Sybil Thorndike¹²⁰ a unique figure in the theatre of our time – one who inspires deep affection and one whose achievement in the theatre commands great respect. [...] A flair of leadership of this calibre is most essential in an organisation as complex as the National Theatre. The company must worship their director and be ready and eager to follow him, as if that were all that mattered to them.¹²¹

The director of the National Theatre, therefore, had to be someone of an almost "heroic stature" (Elsom, and Tomalin 112). An unchallengeable theatrical reputation, however, was not enough. The first artistic director of the institution also had to be "flexible to absorb the ideas and styles of the new generation" (Elsom, and Tomalin 112). A great part of the supporters for the scheme came from this young generation of theatre practitioners, and a National Theatre could impossibly ignore recent developments in British Drama. The "theatrical Hercules" (Elsom, and Tomalin 112), therefore, had to be both, an established

¹²⁰ Dame Agnes Sybil Thorndike (1882-1976) was a British actress.

¹²¹ Anonymous. "Situation Vacant." *Stage* 12 July 1962. The article further: "Rumour has it that Laurence Olivier will eventually be offered the artistic directorship and some think his present season at Chichester is in reality a glorified dress rehearsal for the greater task ahead. Such a choice would meet with universal approval. He is a popular idol with the public and wholeheartedly respected by members of the profession for his own acting achievements. In meeting his demands, members of the company would always be inspired by the fact that he could act them off the stage at any time. Furthermore, he probably has fewer enemies in the theatre than any other star of his magnitude."

theatrical figure as well as related to the new guard. Olivier was the only agent in the field with such a profile. As the most renowned classical performer of his time and supporter of the *New Wave*, therefore, he was the only legitimate candidate for the post of artistic director.¹²²

Olivier was well aware of the difficulties that position entailed. In a letter to Peter Hall he described it as the “most tiresome, awkward, embarrassing, forever-compromised, never-right, thankless fucking post that anyone could possibly be fool enough to take on” (qtd. in Coleman 339). However, knowing that the movement needed his glamour and needed him as a figurehead (cf. Coleman 336), and tempted by the enormous symbolic profits this position would bring his standing in the field and in the historical memory, he accepted the post.

5.3.2. Choice of Personnel

Even though Olivier had proven open and supportive to the young generation of theatre practitioners, he still remained part of the old guard and prime representative of the theatrical Establishment. As artistic director of the National Theatre he knew that he would, once again, have to find a way to overcome the generational gap between himself and the new guard from which the most recent innovations and developments in British theatre radiated. With his active involvement in *The Entertainer*, Olivier had once already proven the kind of “instinctive creative intelligence” (Billington 1994: 9) necessary to do so.

“Olivier’s success in the early years at the National”, states Billington, “lay in surrounding himself with radical young talent” (2007: 140). After Hall had refused to join him at the NT because he wanted to make his own number one in Stratford (cf. Fay 141) and Devine, also, preferred not to give up the Royal Court for the National (cf. Elsom, and Tomalin 125), there were still several agents left in the field representative of the recent developments in British drama. One of them was Kenneth Tynan. Tynan himself approached Olivier in 1962 for the post of literary manager, the “equivalent of the continental dramaturg and a wholly new concept in British theatre” (Billington 2007: 141).

¹²² Cf. Bourdieu: “[T]he strategies of agents and institutions engaged in literary or artistic struggles are not defined by a pure confrontation with pure possibles. Rather, they depend on the position these agents occupy in the structure of the field (that is to say, in the structure of the distribution of specific capital) or the recognition [...] which is granted to them by their competitor-peers and by the public as a whole, and which influences their perception of the possibles offered by the field and their ‘choice’ of those they will try to make into reality or produce” (1996: 206).

Because Tynan had recently given him a bad review, Olivier first thought to “slaughter the little bastard” (1982: 202) but soon realised the appointment would not be such a bad idea after all. Tynan, a powerful agent in the field and prime combatant for the *New Wave*, would be the connection to the young generation Olivier so desperately needed. Without this connection the National might have been left “dangerously exposed in a rapidly changing theatre world” (Shellard 2007: xxv). Furthermore, Olivier needed Tynan on his team “in order to disarm him”. By engaging Tynan as dramaturg Oliver had neutralised a potentially damaging critic. “They would probably rather have me on the inside pissing out, than on the outside pissing in”, states Tynan (qtd. in Elsom, and Tomalin 130). Tynan’s appointment was certainly a calculated decision. It ensured a “creative tension which, whatever difficulties it might engender, certainly warded off any danger of premature stagnation” (Harold Hobson qtd. in Lambert 15). It was also a clever move in order to establish a distinct identity from the Royal Shakespeare Company and to answer critics who feared it would reject challenging new work. Tynan’s appointment was controversial but certainly Olivier’s crucial link to a younger generation.¹²³ What resulted was a “deliberately contrived blend of traditional skills with the new radicalism” (Elsom 1976: 165). In addition to Tynan, Olivier needed the foremost directors and actors of the country for his company. After Devine had refused to join Olivier at the NT, John Dexter and William Gaskill, two producers closely associated with the *New Wave* who had made their reputation at the Royal Court, were engaged as associate directors (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 53). Olivier also recruited actors such as Joan Plowright, Colin Blakely, Robert Stephens and Frank Finlay from the Royal Court. This nucleus of actors and directors proves the Court’s “major share in the launching and establishment for the National Theatre Company” (Findlater 1981: 72). Headhunting agents who firmly belonged to the young generation but had already accumulated a great amount of symbolic capital on the pole of restricted production was a crucial strategy in Olivier’s set up for the National Theatre. Doing so, he accomplished to “counter his own Establishment standing by surrounding himself with young” talent (cf. Shellard 2008: 196).

¹²³ See the British Library exhibition *The Golden Generation – British Theatre 1945-68*, 27 August – 30 November 2008, The Folio Society Gallery at the British Library.

5.4. Purpose, Rivalry and the Value of Struggle

Within the first years of its existence, the dominant standing of the National Theatre in the field as the foremost and exemplary theatrical institution of the country was not necessarily given as such, even though the subsidy it received suggested such a fact. The arrival and success of the Royal Court and the Royal Shakespeare Company in the immediate years before Olivier launched his first season as artistic director of the National Theatre at the Old Vic had made the institution the country had so desperately longed for somewhat redundant. The Royal Court offered a platform for new British writing and the RSC was a large-scale, permanent company which satisfied the support of the work of Shakespeare. Kavanagh Fearon argues that the Court and the RSC, therefore, delayed the establishment of the National Theatre because the two institutions already satisfied to some degree ideas about what a National Theatre should be (cf. 107). While the original concept of the National in the 19th century entailed a formal institution to promote Shakespeare, the NT in the early sixties could not claim this purpose for itself as this role was already effectively discharged by the RSC (cf. Kavanagh Fearon 109). Peter Hall's company closely resembled the idea of a national theatre, as *Encore Magazine* wrote in 1962:

It would be ironic if England spent over two million pounds on an abstraction called the National Theatre and ignored the concrete reality now at Stratford and the Aldwych. For if the National theatre becomes the ideal organisation it should, it would have to resemble, strikingly, the Royal Shakespeare. Which is to say it would have to be a company that maintains a permanent group of actors; that negotiates easily between a classic and modern repertoire; that inclines towards experimental work and brings to our notice interesting continental trends and writers. This, with practically no subsidy at all, the Royal Shakespeare has been doing. (*View from the Gods* 40 9.6: 6)

Both in official status and in policy the two organisations were, and are, widely different. Hall had restructured the RSC according to his ideals and in order to fulfil certain needs he perceived and felt crucial to the theatre of his time. The Royal Shakespeare Company, therefore, started as “an expressive need in search of an institution” while the National Theatre, after over one hundred years of political debate, began as “an institution in search of an expressive need” (Wardle 1966: 107). It is no surprise that, in Britain, the latter was the one which received the greater amount of money from the government (cf. Wardle

1966: 107). Even though the National was granted a subsidy in its first season five times as large as that of the RSC, the company's true purpose in the field was not clearly defined. While its "physical survival" had never been in danger as the RSC's and the ESC's often had, its "creative survival" seemed uncertain:

Unlike the Royal Shakespeare Company, it had to develop an aesthetic purpose out of thin air: the danger was that it might turn out to be a bureaucratic invention, putting on empty productions simply to justify its existence on paper. One tends to mistrust theatrical enterprises in which the building precedes the activity. (Wardle 1966: 110)

Tynan described the "immediate task" of a National Theatre as "to assemble the best available actors and put them into a snowballing repertoire of the best available plays, ancient and modern, comic and tragic, native and foreign" (*National Theatre* 242). Furthermore, it had the responsibility to "encourage the best international directors, actors and companies to perform for a British audience" (Kavanagh Fearon 109). In other words, it was not the National's task, and certainly not Olivier's goal, to be the avant-garde of British theatre in leading artistic developments, discovering new plays and directors or in encouraging new writing. Rather, Olivier chose to go along with existing theatrical trends and to lure successful agents away from other institutions where they had already made their reputation.¹²⁴ Bourdieu states that the principal opposition between pure production and large-scale production is intersected by a "secondary opposition that is established, within the subfield of pure production, between the avant-garde and the consecrated avant-garde" (1996: 121). Agents like Dexter or Gaskill certainly already belonged to the consecrated avant-garde of British theatre. Therefore, with the pretension to present the best of everything, the National Theatre immediately assumed the position of a representative, consecrated theatrical institution in the field on neither the pole of restricted nor the pole of commercial production. A great argument aroused upon its opening in 1963 whether the NT would merely discharge a national obligation in a dry and official way, like a museum, or whether it would actually achieve to be an innovative, vital artistic company like the RSC. The whole concept of a "national"¹²⁵ theatre was, after all, based

¹²⁴ Cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 45. Of course there were exceptions like, for instance, Tom Stoppard.

¹²⁵ For a discussion of the term "national" in relation to a theatrical institution heavily subsidised by public money and the "national" purpose of such an institution see Elsom, and Tomalin 135-139. It should also be noted that there had been different ideas of a "National Theatre" in the movements towards such an institution. "While some commentators such as Matthew Arnold

primarily upon sociological considerations that it would create a greater interest in theatre and benefit the local communities and the nation as a whole. The crucial question, however, remained whether a National Theatre did, or should, have a specific artistic purpose distinct from its sociological benefits.¹²⁶

The struggle which inevitably followed the establishment of two large-scale subsidised companies in London within only three years was necessarily one over identity and purpose. Also, it was one over subsidy. While the Royal Shakespeare Company had to show itself worthy of substantial state funds in the first years of its existence, the National Theatre of Great Britain had to prove that the resources it exhausted were indeed artistically justified in comparison to RSC. Hall clearly used the fact that the NT received such large subsidies in order to gain more substantial funds for his own company.¹²⁷ In forestalling the establishment of the NT with the large-scale RSC, Hall did not try to prevent the National Theatre from happening altogether. He recognised that, paradoxically,

the best chance of realising his own grand plan was to support the creation of the one institution that might obliterate it, the National Theatre. [...] Its establishment would act as a lever in the campaign for greater drama subsidy in an environment that was by European standards noticeably parsimonious. (Chambers 2004: 23-24)

Kavanagh Fearon argues that, despite delaying the process towards the establishment of the NT, the RSC also mobilised the movement out of the stagnation of the 1950s by challenging the right of the National for funding and repertory choices. The RSC enabled the National to find its true artistic purpose and identity “through contrast and comparison” (cf. 115). Hall points out that he

(1879) saw it as a state subsidised venture, others emphasised that the theatre should be independent and also sought effective ways of financing the theatre from private sources [...] (e.g., Granville-Barker and Archer, 1907). In this case, the notion of ‘national’ was closer to ‘exemplary’ or ‘of national importance’ rather than government subsidy” (Lee 293).

¹²⁶ Lewis sums up Olivier’s term as artistic director of the National Theatre as follows: “By the end of Olivier’s ten-year period as Director, his company had mounted some seventy productions. Of these, thirty were outstanding successes with the public, averaging audiences of over 90 per cent, and winning overwhelming critical approval. That is a high success rate by any standards. Nevertheless Olivier’s record was criticized on various grounds: that it was a ‘museum theatre’, not adventurous enough in mounting modern plays; that it was a showcase for Olivier, that there were not enough other stars; that there was too little company identity; finally that its programme was not as interesting as the RSC’s” (76).

¹²⁷ Cf. Hall in an interview with Addenbrooke: “During the early years of the National, I certainly did use the fact that the National was getting a lot of money from the word go – to point out the fact that we weren’t. I didn’t try to demonstrate that we were better than the National – or that we *were* the National. [...] We were two very different institutions, but I think that Larry [Olivier] would be the first person to admit that what happened at the RSC in 1960 and ’61 and ’62, paved the way and helped in the formation of the National Theatre. We *were* the first company in this country in those sort of terms” (Addenbrooke 231).

did not see the RSC in direct competition with the National: “On the contrary, we each help[ed] to define the other” (qtd. in Wardle 1966: 111). “Two national companies in Britain,” according to Hall, “were exactly what was needed for the country’s theatrical health” (1993: 170). Tynan claims that a form of competition between the two companies was, in fact, desirable because “artistic competition usually makes for better art” (cf. *National Theatre* 240). While the two institutions did and should have very distinct artistic purposes, their work was clearly and directly comparable in terms of quality, output, and staffing.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, the financial disparities between the companies remained extraordinary. As one of many, Tynan appealed that the National and the RSC should be able to compete with each other on equal terms. The *Evening Standard* agreed that, if state patronage remained in “virtually monopolistic” hands, an “incestuous decline” might result from the lack of a lively competition between the two major companies (qtd. in Lewis 71). Just as the subsidised Théâtre National Populaire competed with the subsidised Comédie Française in Paris, a desirable competitive situation was on the horizon in the London theatre of the early 1960s. In 1962, *Plays and Players* wrote: “There is room and need for two companies”.¹²⁹

Today, even Olivier would agree that the institutional struggles over subsidy and artistic purpose in the early sixties proved most fertile to the development of British theatre. After “centuries of lagging behind other countries”, Britain now possessed two large-scale, subsidised institutions, “both of which have achieved international reputations” (Lambert 23). By 1966, the NT and RSC had become the “great battleships of the British theatre”, states George Devine (qtd. in Thomsen 15). A rivalry between the two was inevitable, but it was also healthy. The two institutions strengthened each other in the field and together, they could slowly challenge the dominance of the commercial theatre.

¹²⁸ Tynan doesn’t see it as the National’s task, for instance, to evolve a particular style like the RSC. He states that the National has a “much more general purpose” and “has to do certain dull but basic jobs, which are essentially educational” (see *Talk with Tynan* 10). See also Beauman 347-348. Wardle describes the difference between the two institutions as follows: “Given the presence of Olivier as a figurehead, the popular character of much of the repertoire, and the very name of the organization, the National Theatre has acquired the reputation of being a permanently sold-out middle-class Mecca – the new home of audiences who abandoned the West End. The Royal Shakespeare, on the other hand, through its shortage of money, its crusade to attract young audiences, and its much publicized espousal of new playwrights and cult movements [...], has come to be regarded as an avant-garde stronghold” (1966: 111).

¹²⁹ Anonymous. “Aldwych Subsidy.” *Plays and Players* (Sept. 1962).

[B]y the autumn of 1963 the twin national companies were both up and running: a structure was in place that was to shape British theatre over future decades and that was to mark a decisive shift in the balance of power away from the commercial sector. At the time both the National and the RSC were the focus of theatrical idealism and youthful optimism: only later did they come to be seen as grant-consuming behemoths and icons of Establishment power. (Billington 2007: 140)

6. Power Play

6.1. Balance of Power

By the mid-1960s, states Elsom, “we could justifiably feel that the West End no longer dictated the standards to the theatre as a whole. A much greater variety of theatrical experiences had replaced the old uniformity” (1976: 6). Billington argues that the “creation of the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre in embryo at the Old Vic represented a major shift away from the haphazard chaos of commercialism towards the coherence of subsidy”¹³⁰ (2007: 161). The West End had certainly not disappeared from the landscape but it was strongly affected in its domination of the theatrical field by the establishment of two large-scale subsidised organisations. Even when the National had not fully reached its complete scale without the purpose-built theatre on the South Bank, the balance of power started to shift towards the subsidised sector. “As public trust grew in the Royal Shakespeare and National companies, [...] it declined in the West End” (Wardle 1966: 107). The press, equally, was solidly behind the new, subsidised companies: “the mere circumstance of being produced by a subsidized company seemed to guarantee a playwright more respectful critical treatment than he would have received in a commercial production” (Wardle 1966: 105-106). Soon the two “warlords” (cf. Chambers 1980: 9), the RSC and the National, became to dictate public taste. With both the critics and large audiences on their side, especially the RSC attempted more daring and risky productions. “Hard-headed managers” of the commercial theatre were soon “obliged to acknowledge [that] change in public taste. John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Arnold Wesker, N.F. Simpson – all found their way into West End theatres” (Marowitz, Milne, and Hale 75).

¹³⁰ 2007: 161. Billington further states that this had to do with the fact that “Britain, in the early Sixties, was a very different country from the austere, disciplined, deeply hierarchical place it had been in the immediate post-war years” (see 2007: 161).

Billington argues that, in the face of the subsidised theatre, the West End had become somewhat stagnant: “all the real life and energy seemed to be in the subsidised institutions [...]. Where in the past it had dominated the surrounding terrain and colonised satellite kingdoms,” the West End now grew increasingly “dependent on imported product to sustain its home base” (Billington 2007: 208). Virtually all the successful plays of the decade had their origins in the subsidised theatre.¹³¹ The West End became “a shop-window for goods purchased from the subsidised sector and Broadway” (Billington 1994: 139).

The old rules had broken down. Previously the theatrical world had been divided between the rich pastures of Shaftesbury Avenue and the shoe-string houses of the avant-garde. But now all the little theatres that flourished in London after the war had vanished, and the avant-garde (if one could still call it that) was entrenched in the main citadels of power. (Wardle 1966: 106)

The subsidised theatre, therefore, had managed to break the dual opposition between the restricted/autonomous and large-scale/commercial poles of production. The National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company formed a new, and certainly dominant, pole of subsidised theatre in their own right. The arrival of two large-scale national theatres not only resulted in the gradual decline of the West End’s power but also severely influenced the Royal Court’s standing in the field.

6.2. The Royal Court in the 1960s

The Royal Court theatre of the late 1950s, breeding the new generation of English theatre practitioners and striving for more autonomy from external determinants like stage censorship under the Lord Chamberlain, truly paved the way for all later developments in the field of London theatre. Both structurally and artistically, the Court expanded the limits of what appeared possible in the theatre. As a sort of theatrical trendsetter and spearhead, the ESC certainly contributed to a situation within the field which made the establishment of the two national institutions first possible. Esslin strongly believes that “the coming

¹³¹ Including Osborne’s *West of Suez*, Nichols’ *Forget-Me-Not-Lane*, Ayckbourn’s *How The Other Half Loves*, Hampton’s *The Philanthropist* and Sartre’s *Kean*. See Billington 2007: 208. Lambert states that of the 350 productions put on in West End theatres between 1964 and 1973, around 100 were first staged in a subsidised theatre, either produced in direct association with a commercial management or taken over by a commercial company after an initial success (cf. 50). By November 1975, 19 out of 34 shows in the West End were first produced in subsidised houses (cf. Billington 1994: 64). Duff, however, argues that “interesting new plays were still to be found in the West [...]” despite the loss of power in West End managements (xii).

of the National Theatre and the transformation of the Royal Shakespeare Company [...] radiate[d] outward from the Royal Court experience" (Doty, and Harbin 207). However, once these institutions were established on a scale the Court could impossibly keep up with, its position in the field appeared severely weakened. The homepage of the Royal Court calls the institution "Britain's first national theatre company". Over the years, the Court has held firm to its vision of being a writers' theatre but it never again reached the artistic significance it had in the immediate years following the establishment of the ESC in 1956. With the RSC's opening of the Aldwych in 1960, the competition for the Royal Court had begun to arrive in London to challenge its unique position in the theatrical field. From then on the ESC had to compete with two heavily subsidised companies for both audiences and artists. It was a struggle between opponents whose resources were significantly different. Once an artist had achieved a big success at the Court, it was clear that he or she would soon be lured away by the National or the RSC. The Royal Court began to suffer from what Martin Esslin calls a "syndrome of all relentlessly financially weak avant-garde theatres, who are always afraid of losing their best people by success" (Doty and Harbin 103). As the two subsidised ventures offered not only economic rewards (like the West End did) but also artistic prestige, the outside temptations for directors, actors and dramatists became too great so that, as a result, the Court could not hold together its core team of artists that constituted the company's strong identity over the first years of its existence. Furthermore, the monopoly the ESC carried in the immediate years after its establishment was broken by the arrival of the two subsidised ventures. In 1956, the Royal Court set itself the goal to encourage new English writing and to provide a home for the modern playwright. Having achieved that goal within only a few months, the Court proved that such an institution was both necessary and crucial to the London theatre in the mid-20th century. Soon it became clear, however, that what the ESC had accomplished was in fact exactly what "the second house of the National Theatre ought to be achieving, that smaller affiliated auditorium envisaged by Archer as the home of off-beat moderns and neglected classics" (Tyman in 1957, *Closing the Gaps* 177). Once the National Theatre became reality, it could be argued, the Royal Court's job in the field was basically done.

“If the National Theatre promotes the new dramatist,” argued Devine, “the future of the Royal Court could be affected”¹³².

With the decline of the West End and the emergence of two large-scale permanent companies playing in repertoire modern as well as classical plays, the Royal Court had to “reassess its position” in the field. The “theatre world had moved on since Devine began the venture” and the “danger was that of innovator being overtaken” (Roberts 105). Gaskill concluded that “the Court’s role in the new scheme of things was that it should ‘maintain itself as a theatre where risks can be taken in a way that the larger companies cannot afford’” (cf. Roberts 105). With the Lord Chamberlain still in power, the Royal Court had yet another battle to fight that came to dominate the institution throughout the 1960s. The ESC, therefore, intensified its policy to challenge “the artistic, social and political orthodoxy of the day, pushing back the boundaries of what was possible or acceptable” in the theatre (cf. *Royal Court Theatre Homepage*). The ESC united playwrights to struggle with the Lord Chamberlain, with the Arts Council, with the British Council and with members of Parliament (cf. Doty, and Harbin 58). The battle for the abolition of stage censorship marked Gaskill’s regime at the Royal Court. The situation escalated with the production of Edward Bond’s *Saved* in 1965.¹³³ Liebenstein-Kurtz argues that *Saved* was a “typical” Royal Court piece that would not have found its way onto the English stage if it wasn’t for the ESC (cf. 233). Bond himself states that “no other English theatre [...] would have produced [his] plays” (qtd. in Liebenstein-Kurtz 233). Therefore, the Royal Court still had a somewhat unique position and

¹³² Pearson 5. Devine further: “If it does no more in this direction than the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, the necessity for us still remains. Whatever happens, it should be part of the National Theatre policy to subsidise a Royal Court!”

¹³³ While club performances, by a “gentleman’s agreement” and a system of “repressive tolerance”, were in some vague way exempt from the Lord Chamberlain’s rulings, *Saved* was deemed too extreme for either private or public presentation (cf. Little, and McLaughlin 36). See also Findlater: “So many cuts were demanded by the Lord Chamberlain in *Saved* that it was resolved [...] to stage it only for members of the English Stage Society. But after a police visit to the theatre the Lord Chamberlain, in a spasm of unprecedented activism, issued summonses against Gaskill, Esdaile and Greville Poke [...] on the grounds that *Saved* was not a bona fide club production: a member of his staff visiting the play had not been asked for proof of his ‘club’ membership. Although the magistrate found against the Court, the ESC was fined only £50 in costs, and Gaskill, Esdaile and Poke were conditionally discharged. From now on it was clear that it was illegal to stage plays anywhere without a license from the Lord Chamberlain, whether or not they were presented under club conditions – a result that defeated his apparent object in bringing the prosecution. This moral victory, which accelerated the end of the Lord Chamberlain’s powers over the theatre, was followed two years later by another battle over a Bond play – *Early Morning*” (1981: 91-92).

purpose in the field even though its prominent standing had diminished. The Court was different to the National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company in the 1960s because it chose to fight its battles primarily against external determinants of the theatre rather than struggling against the other, structurally superior, institutions within the field.¹³⁴ The controversies which accompanied plays produced by the Court and the struggles against the Lord Chamberlain dominated Devine's and Gaskill's work. Those struggles, in fact, made for the success and survival of the Royal Court over the first decade of its existence. Gaskill states that there "was a line through [their] work that, if nothing else, [they] were fighting the censor" on behalf of the playwright (qtd. in Roberts 128). When stage censorship was finally abolished in Great Britain on 28 September 1968¹³⁵, the Royal Court had strangely lost its *raison d'être* (cf. Roberts 128). In the 1970s, there was "a feeling that the Royal Court's usefulness had come to an end" (Doty, and Harbin 64). The establishment of the Theatre Upstairs in February 1969, the first small studio theatre attached to a main house in Great Britain, seemed representative of that fact. Gaskill recognised that "contemporary theatre was developing new forms which the Court needed to acknowledge and include" (Little, and McLaughlin 114). The Royal Court was the first theatre in the UK which drove potentially non-successful plays from the main stage to the smaller auditorium of the theatre (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 337). New plays by unknown authors would almost exclusively be performed in the Theatre Upstairs. However, for over a decade the Royal Court Theatre itself had been the "small stage" of the London theatre. The ESC had taken chances no other theatre had dared. Even though the

¹³⁴ It would be wrong to argue that the Royal Court was the *only* institution in London to actively fight against the Lord Chamberlain, but it certainly was the foremost company to do so. The early and mid-sixties were dominated by all kinds of major battles against the censor. Compare, for instance, the Dirty Plays row at the RSC in 1964. Hall's company certainly contributed a great share to the abolition of stage censorship in Great Britain.

¹³⁵ "On 28 September 1968, the Theatres Bill [...] became law and removed jurisdiction over the theatre from the Lord Chamberlain. The musical *Hair* opened the same night. 'We have battled all these years against the censor,' Gaskill reported, 'and he is eventually going, *without ever actually having stopped a play reaching the stage*'. The new act still allowed for prosecutions over the content of plays, but provided a robust defence that if a producer could prove the performance was for the public good because it was in the interest of drama, literature or learning, there was no offence" (Little, and McLaughlin 112). Billington calls the demise of theatrical censorship in 1968 historically "the most important event of the time" (2007: 202): "Over 230 years of stifling state power was ended at a stroke: no longer would writers and directors have to go cap in hand to argue the toss over deleted expletives, intimations of sexual intercourse, references to the Deity of the representation of living persons on stage" (2007: 163).

Royal Court was once again the theatrical spearhead in noticing a trend towards smaller spaces, which soon came to dominate the English theatre, it appears paradox that the company would no longer take risks on its “big stage”. After all, risks were what had always defined the English Stage Company at the Royal Court.

6.3. The New Orthodoxy

1973 was a somewhat symbolic year in the new structure of British Theatre. The “split between the subsidised and commercial sectors [had] widened into a chasm” (Billington 1994: 7) and Binkie Beaumont’s death on 22 March clearly marked the end of an era. The “undisputed king of the forties, fifties and early sixties” (Hall 2000: 54) was gone, and with him, the shining glimmer and dominance of the West End faded. Also, 1973 was the year in which Peter Hall took over the National Theatre from Laurence Olivier as artistic director. Towards the end of the sixties and early seventies, the time had come for both the RSC and the NT to appoint successors to Hall and Olivier, the two figureheads who had led the national companies into existence. In both institutions, a new generation was taking over the lead, but the process of finding an heir to the throne appeared significantly different within the two companies. When Hall resigned from his position as artistic director of the RSC in 1968, he chose his own successor: Trevor Nunn¹³⁶. As Peter Hall, Nunn was only in his late twenties when he took over the company, but he had worked for the RSC as a director for several years. He consequently knew the organisation and its problems. Nunn’s succession to the leadership, therefore, was seen only as an “internal change in the existing artistic and administrative structure of the RSC” and ensured a “continuity of the company’s identity, as created by Peter Hall” (cf. an RSC press release qtd. in Addenbrooke 151). Nunn’s appointment guaranteed artistic continuity within the organisation, which was regarded absolutely crucial to the style and tradition Hall had established for the company (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 277). The suggestion came from Hall himself and the RSC Board merely had to agree to the choice of Trevor Nunn. At the National Theatre, however, Olivier didn’t have that kind of influence over the matter. The

¹³⁶ Sir Trevor Robert Nunn was born on 14 January 1940. He was artistic director of the RSC from 1968-1986 and of the National Theatre from 1997-2003.

NT Board chose his successor without even consulting him. In the early 1970s, the National faced severe organisational challenges. The South Bank building was still not finished, and once the huge concrete complex was ready for occupation, the company would certainly have to enlarge its scale in order to fill the three auditoria. They would need a far greater number of productions than at the Old Vic, a larger acting ensemble, more technical and administrative staff. Consequently, the National would have to absorb much greater subsidies in a time when a world economic recession showed its damaging effects on Great Britain.¹³⁷ In addition, ongoing delays about the actual completion of the building complicated the matter (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 300). It soon became clear that Olivier's health wouldn't allow him to direct the National until the South Bank theatre was finished. His replacement would certainly face severe struggles leading the company into the new building and, thus, would have to be an extraordinarily strong personality and leading figure in the London theatre. In the late sixties, there was no other administrator quite like Peter Hall in the profession. "Hall was the man of his time, a new time – the Sixties" (Fay 257). He had fought and won the battle over state subsidy and contributed his share to the abolition of stage censorship. By the end of the sixties he was one of the, if not *the*, most powerful and established agents in the field, and he was certainly confident enough to take over the huge responsibility of the National Theatre. Hall, therefore, was the "logical choice" and the appointment was formally announced in March 1972 (Addenbrooke 40).

Olivier was certainly disappointed by the choice of Peter Hall and felt passed over in the process. He had regarded it as a central duty of his career to establish a National Theatre (cf. Coleman 338) and surely wanted to be remembered as the founder of the company in the tradition of Stanislavsky, Brecht, and Barrault.¹³⁸ The fact that his greatest rival took over that company once he was gone certainly did not fit into the picture. Olivier states: "I had always thought that Stratford would be his Ultima Thule as the National was mine" (247). Tynan felt that, unlike the RSC which could develop "organically,

¹³⁷ For the effects of inflation on the theatrical profession in the early 1970s in England see Liebenstein-Kurtz 250-256.

¹³⁸ Joan Plowright, Olivier's third wife, states: "Barrault had formed his own company and it was known as his company. Secretly I think Larry would like the National to have been known as *his* in the same way. In one way it was. When he was there, there was nobody else to touch him" (qtd. in Coleman 416).

by evolution", the National underwent a "heart transplant on a perfectly healthy patient" (Tynan, Kathleen 314). Fact is, however, that there probably was no other agent in the field who could have taken on the job and succeed as Hall did. Whomever Olivier suggested as his successor, the NT Board neglected because the agent didn't seem to have "enough stature". While Olivier thought "the job would create the stature" (Olivier 242), the Board was convinced that Hall alone could handle the difficult times which lay ahead of the company.¹³⁹ Before his death, Binkie Beaumont stated that Hall, the "empire builder", would "undoubtedly measure up to the job".¹⁴⁰

It appears to be one of the greatest ironies in the history of British theatre that, after well over a hundred years of struggle for the building of a National Theatre, nobody seemed to be wanting such an institution when it was just about to open on the South Bank in 1976. In his *Diaries*, Hall notes on 10 March 1975:

I reflect tonight on our plight at the National Theatre. Who wants the National Theatre at this point? The government don't because they have insufficient money for all the claims upon them. The Arts Council don't because they have not included us for extra amounts in their budgets. The media don't want us because it is very good news in this time of austerity and increasing puritanism that a £14 million temple of fun is a mistake and an aberration. The profession don't want us because they are fearful. So who does want us? Just us, I am afraid, and so it will continue until we actually get into the building and prove what it's for.¹⁴¹

"At a time when housing, health, education and food subsidies were all being cut," notes Billington, "the opening of big communal playhouses began to look like a dangerous luxury" (Billington 1994: 82). As the old political system had failed to provide long-term stability, people began to question the whole concept of theatre subsidy when both national companies were on the brink of

¹³⁹ Billington argues that it is "hard to think of any other figure in British theatre who would have had the tenacity, stamina, and sheer bloody-mindedness to have overcome the obstacles in his path: not least the insidious campaign of vilification conducted by personal enemies and philistine newspapers" (2007: 255)

¹⁴⁰ Qtd. in Lewis 97. Interestingly, one of the first things Hall demanded upon his appointment as artistic director of the National was greater autonomy from the NT Board. As he had accomplished at the RSC, he demanded to have the final say in artistic as well as financial matters. While that right still lay with the Board under Olivier, Hall increased the artistic director's independence and power relative to that of the Board (cf. Lewis 99).

¹⁴¹ 2000: 161. Cf. also Hall: "I did 15 years at the National [...]. The first seven were hell, the last eight were lovely. [...] When we opened the National Theatre, the profession was scared and didn't want it. The Arts Council didn't want it because they thought it would use resources which should be used in the regions. The press didn't want it because it's good copy. It was an extraordinary time" (2009).

expansion¹⁴². The press found an easy target in the new National Theatre on the South Bank. With the enormous concrete complex in sight, the theatrical profession itself feared that “buildings would come to dictate policy” (Billington 2007: 237). The theatre would house three auditoria and Hall, necessarily, would have to attract an immense audience because he had an enormous number of seats to fill. “To make it work,” states Fay, “[Hall] would have to be the consummate showbusiness impresario” (304). In order to attract the general public, the National would need a popular programme and a great number of stars. The theatre was, once again, “in danger of becoming as much a vast administrative and architectural machine as a vehicle for producing plays” (Billington 2007: 236). It appeared as if the system returned to some structures it so desperately tried to overcome in its past. Furthermore, the National was feared to gain an almost monopolistic control over all theatrical talent in London and around the country. While Hall would sometimes argue that the NT was “the heart of the theatre system, drawing in talent from the regions and elsewhere, and pumping it out again in a purified form around the circuits”, other agents in the field in a less fortunate situation would regard it as “a leech, drawing off the blood of enterprise which they needed to stay alive” (Elsom, and Tomalin 143). In fact, both the National and the RSC appeared to consume most of the resources available to the theatre. Taking roughly half of the Arts Council’s available drama budget between them, there was a general fear that these two “monoliths might eventually swallow up too much of the available talent and resources” and achieve an “unhealthy dominance” in the field (cf. Billington 2007: 264). Fourteen artistic directors wrote a letter to *The Times* warning that the new National Theatre might absorb so much government money that other theatres would be starved (Billington 1994: 39). That letter was signed by such agents as Oscar Lewenstein, Lindsay Anderson, Joan Littlewood and Richard Eyre, however, it was about fifteen years too late to show an influence on the argument. The theatres had already been built. In March 1976, after over 130 years “of lobbying, committeeing and stone-moving” (Billington 1994: 82), the National Theatre finally opened its doors with a performance of Peggy Ashcroft in *Happy Days* at the *Lyttelton*. The *Lyttelton*

¹⁴² The RSC, too, expected a new home in London. In 1965, “the City of London Court of Common Council agreed that they should build a new theatre in their planned Arts Centre in the Barbican development, and that it should be leased to a resident company, the RSC” (Beauman 282). The RSC took up residence in the Barbican in 1982.

was only the first of the three auditoria in the South Bank building to be opened. The *Olivier* was launched in October 1976 with Peter Hall's production of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great* and the *Cottesloe* finally staged its first public performance in March 1977.¹⁴³ Upon the opening of the Olivier, Billington wrote in 1976:

Irony of ironies. In a week when the Olivier finally opened its doors and the 125-year-old dream of a properly equipped National Theatre came a little closer to reality, attacks on the institution itself seemed to intensify. What is particularly sad is that those attacks have very little to do with what appears on stage. They have much more to do with a hysterical malice, hatred, venom and envy directed by members of the theatrical profession towards Peter Hall. And we have reached the stage where, if an actor in Wrexham Rep cannot afford a new pair of tights, it is all the fault of Hall and his sybaritic cronies who spend their days lolling on beds of down puffing at opium pipes and making bonfires of public money. [...] The crude, irremovable fact is that, like it or not, we have a large National Theatre with three auditoria. And that is the result of a decision taken in the early 1960s by a committee that included men of wisdom like Lord Olivier, George Devine, Peter Brook, Michael Elliott and Kenneth Tynan. [...] [I]t was that committee that landed us with the industrial complex we have today and it is they, and not the Hall administration, that should be blamed for the three million or so pounds it costs to keep the National functioning annually.¹⁴⁴

Nevertheless, as unpopular as the new National Theatre might have appeared in the profession and in the press, the “paying public, after years of cramped conditions, high prices and churlish service in the West End, flocked to the building from its first day” (Billington 2007: 253). The National's popularity with the general public proved the position the institution had assumed in the theatrical field. The “size of the audience”, states Bourdieu, “undoubtedly constitutes the surest and clearest indicator of the position occupied in the field.” (1996: 218). With the new building on the South Bank and the decline of the West End, it was only natural that the National Theatre had become the new theatrical Establishment. Both the NT and the RSC were recognised as the new artistic orthodoxy which needed to be antagonised. Attitudes had severely changed since 1956:

¹⁴³ Cf. Findlater 1977, paragraph 16. For the naming of the three auditoria see Hallifax 353.

¹⁴⁴ Billington 1994: 91. When Olivier was appointed as the first director of the National Theatre in 1962, the National Theatre Board promised that a theatre would be built for the company ready for occupation by 1969. The original plan of the London City Council was to have a site on the South Bank which would house not only the National Theatre but also Sadler's Wells Opera. The “dual idea” was not dropped completely until 1967 and contributed much to the severe delays (cf. Hallifax 248).

Within twenty years, from 1956 to 1976, the commonly expressed attitudes within the theatrical profession to the new National underwent an abrupt change. In 1956, the National was an honourable cause, not lost but infinitely delayed. By 1976, it had become an object of much jealousy, a threat to lesser theatres, a symbol of privilege. (Elsom, and Tomalin 142)

From their very beginnings, both the National and the RSC had immediately gained their status as Britain's 'national' theatres and appeared to be responding to, rather than leading, the field (cf. Shellard 2008: 196). Back in 1962 when struggling for the course of the Royal Shakespeare Company, Hall had already thought of large theatrical institutions, like a National Theatre which had then not existed in the UK, as providing a "central point of reference" and "something to react against". Cynical as it may sound, he thought of that being the "main case for a National Theatre" (cf. 1962: 11). By the mid-1970s, when the National had been firmly established and moved into its purpose-built theatre, Hall's imagination had become reality and he was the one leading the institution. With Olivier retired and Beaumont gone, Hall himself had turned into the most representative figure of the theatrical Establishment. He certainly was no longer the young revolutionary. By the mid-seventies, he was "at the height of [his] career, very successful [...], very powerful: directing plays, films, operas, running a vast organisation, writing, appearing on television". Hall had always been a public figure, but now he belonged to the Establishment and needed attacking (cf. Hall 2000: 142). When, in 1962, there couldn't be enough publicity for the RSC, in 1975 Hall notes in his *Diaries* that "[t]here's too much Hall in the papers today" (2000: 194).

Thus, in well under ten years, rebellion had turned into the new orthodoxy; and for anyone out of sympathy with the new regime and suspicious of avant-garde movements in general, its appearance was a classic demonstration of Copeau's famous remark: '*Trop de gens qui ont débuté sur les barricades finissent dans le gouvernement.*' (Wardle 1966: 106)

While the National Theatre had never truly belonged to the avant-garde of British Theatre, it certainly had held a position of *consecrated* avant-garde which established and representative, yet artistically autonomous institutions occupy in the field. A bit later than the National, it could be argued, the Royal Shakespeare Company gained the same status of consecrated avant-garde. Fostering an image of radicalism and avant-garde in its early years, the RSC

became more and more institutionalised as time progressed. “It must be remembered”, states Hinchliffe, “that *avant-garde* is an attitude rather than a style, testing and exploring possibilities which finally, if successful, become conventions and are assimilated into traditional theatre which continues to show predictable forms of entertainment” (196).¹⁴⁵ By the beginning of the seventies, however, the subsidised theatre in London formed a dominant pole of production in its own right and could no longer claim to be the theatrical heresy breaking with the modes of production of the commercial theatre. Growing increasingly dependent on popular audiences themselves, the heavily subsidised institutions had given up their autonomy and assumed an Establishment position. With the National and the RSC absorbing the greatest proportion of the Arts Council’s subsidies between them, the field of London theatre had turned into a “cultural zone of acute institutional inequalities” (Kershaw 2004: 301) and was, once again, open for struggles between the theatrical orthodoxy and new heresy. “1970 saw a more than usual polarisation; between what, for simplicity, we can call the young and the old, the experimental and the traditional” (Hinchliffe 196). Only this time, the National and the RSC formed the old guard which needed attacking.

The London theatre of the early 1970s appeared to have reached a truly ironic state. For more than a century, “the radicals of the theatre have been fighting for a National Theatre: they have collected money for it, given up their careers for it, and spent their energies in a most prodigal and altruistic way for it”, states Hall in 1973. Just before they actually accomplished their goal, “the whole attitude has changed. [...] Here is a perfect metaphor of how the radical dreams of yesterday become the institutions of today, to be fought and despised” (2000: 65). While the late fifties and sixties were dominated by a struggle against the dominance of the commercial sector in the London theatre, “the war between small spaces and big stages” was to become a “constant theme of the Seventies” (Billington 2007: 236).

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Bourdieu: “The avant-garde is at any one time separated by an *artistic generation* (understood as a gap between two modes of artistic production) from the consecrated avant-garde, itself separated by another artistic generation from the avant-garde already consecrated when it made its entry into the field. It follows that, in the space of the artistic field as in social space, distances between styles or lifestyles are never better measured than in terms of time” (Bourdieu 1996: 158-159).

6.4. Outlook

6.4.1. Towards Smaller Spaces

The cultural climate had decisively changed in Great Britain: “Small was beautiful and big was now bad” (cf. Billington 2007: 238). In London and all across the country, the number of alternative theatre companies increased significantly towards the end of the 1960s and early 70s as a reaction to the large companies which dominated the field and had become somewhat stagnant as the theatrical Establishment.

[I]n the economic downturn of the 1970s the national/repertory sector failed to produce significant structural or aesthetic developments, and the focus of innovation shifted to the new fringe (or alternative) theatres. The fringe challenged the conservatism of the reps and redrew the map of the profession in a new era of democratisation and diversity. (Kershaw 2004: 381)

The fringe created a successful and independent theatre movement. *Fringe Theatre* refers to a type of theatre which provides alternatives to the theatrical Establishment of the national companies or the mainstream theatre of the West End. The term is used to describe places and companies which provide the opportunity to tackle new plays or forms and is commonly ascribed to derive from the Edinburgh Festival where small theatre groups started to perform in alternative venues with no connection to the main productions of the festival. Fringe drama is usually radically different to the mainstream theatre, highly experimental, controversial and usually committed to a particular ideology.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, the alternative theatre began to challenge the director, formerly the actor, as the highest authority in the production process. The new companies worked “in defiance of the British theatre’s traditional hegemonic individualism. [...] In a post-1968 climate, where authority figures were suspect, the theatre began to hunger for a semblance of working democracy” (Billington 2007: 239). The very function of breaking with the existing order had shifted from the permanent repertory companies to the fringe. Alternative theatre in small venues showed the most vital activity in the profession:

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Barnes 11. For an excellent discussion of the development of the fringe in Great Britain see Liebenstein-Kurtz 257-275. In reference to Bourdieu’s idea of the *field of possibles*, it is also significant that the fringe could not have developed before the abolition of stage censorship in 1968. Only after the Lord Chamberlain’s reign was ended, the British theatre was open to modes of production and performance which included free improvisation, no concrete stage text and experiments as regards both content and form (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 258).

The limbs of the body of British theatre were entirely rearranged in the 1970s and 80s: fringe theatre companies and small-scale touring groups now exercised their radical muscles and the two national companies often struggled to keep up. (Eyre, and Wright 53)

In Bourdieu's terms, the fringe theatre constituted an interesting development in the field of British theatre because, above all, it wanted to assert a distance from all exiting institutions. Aiming to gain greater autonomy, fringe practitioners, almost by definition, wanted to oppose the established order in the field¹⁴⁷. If the alternative theatre is to be seen as a movement, it is one that was striving for genuine independence. The fringe was prepared to be radical, subversive and shocking (cf. Elsom 1976: 159). Fringe theatres also attracted a specific kind of audience who would usually avoid and oppose mainstream theatres. For many artists in the alternative scene, even the Royal Court had become too institutional a place and too conventional in its work (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 326). It is significant how much the prime advocates for smaller spaces and alternative modes of production outside the heavily subsidised "temples" resembled the earlier generation of youthful optimists rebelling against the commercial West End in the late fifties. However, their struggles against the established order never reached the immense dimensions, in terms of publicity and structural impact, Hall's or Devine's battles had caused. That partly had to do with one "obvious drawback" of the small theatres:

They were themselves élitist, in that they severely restricted the size of their audiences; they could never form the basis for the 'popular' theatre which had been Hall's ideal in the Sixties, and which remained central to the identity of the RSC. (Beauman 312)

Nevertheless, The Arts Council soon acknowledged the importance of the alternative theatre and, by the 1972/73 season, subsidised 56 such ventures.¹⁴⁸ Equally, with the opening of the Theatre Upstairs in 1969, the Royal Court had also acknowledged, if not assisted the movement towards smaller spaces. The National Theatre and the Royal Shakespeare Company could not, and did not, stay ignorant of the developments in the field. Johnson states that, while the field of large scale production is less susceptible to formal experimentation

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Bourdieu 1996: 77 for *The Conquest of Autonomy*

¹⁴⁸ In comparison to only two in 1968/69 and 36 in 1971/72. See Liebenstein-Kurtz 261.

because it is dependent on the broadest possible audience, it “frequently borrows from the restricted field of production in attempts to renew itself” (16).

The leading subsidized theatres [...] cast a benevolent eye towards their struggling fringe rivals. The Royal Court staged a *Come Together* season for fringe companies in 1970, while Peter Hall [...] indicated that he wished the Cottesloe Theatre in the new National Theatre Building to be devoted to visiting fringe companies. (Elsom 1976: 159)

Borrowing from the alternative theatre, however, was not enough. In their attempts to keep up with the developments on the restricted pole of production, the national institutions followed the trend towards smaller spaces. Influenced by economic motives as well as aesthetic ones, the subsidised triumvirate no longer presented new works on their large stages (cf. Liebenstein-Kurtz 312). Following the ESC’s Theatre Upstairs in 1969, the RSC opened two smaller houses, one in Stratford in April 1974 and The Warehouse in Covent Garden only three years later. The new spaces made possible a different relationship between the audience and the performance, “that is, the nature of the experience both for those putting the show on and for those coming along to see it” (Chambers 1980: 9). The RSC learned to appreciate the benefits of flexible, low-budget, small-cast, small-space productions: “They allowed many of the Company’s ideas to be practiced more consistently and effectively than in the larger theatres”¹⁴⁹.

A theatre small enough to risk new work, in which actors could re-examine their work methods and create a different relationship with their audience [...] offered the RSC an opportunity for the same kind of stimulus which had occurred, a decade earlier, when its London seasons were launched. (Beauman 311)

In that way, the mainstream theatre and the fringe started a process of cross-fertilisation. While the alternative theatre defined itself through its opposition to the theatrical orthodoxy, the dominant institutions borrowed and learned from the pole of restricted production. Furthermore, while some later fringe stars got their training in subsidised companies, some of the major talent emerging from the fringe movement eventually became absorbed into the mainstream theatre: David Hare, Howard Brenton, and Trevor Griffiths, just to mention a few. The

¹⁴⁹ Chambers 1980: 80. Chambers (1980) traces the movement towards “other spaces” back to the early 1960s, when Peter Brook’s *Theatre of Cruelty* season, for instance, demonstrated experimental paths leading to the development of the fringe.

fringe, therefore, fulfilled an important task in serving as fertile 'soil' for the established theatre scene (cf. Mengel 64).

6.4.2. Returning West

Towards the end of the decade, the time had come for the West End to regain some of its strength and lost glory in the field. This development was certainly conditioned by the political situation the country found itself in. Margaret Thatcher became leader of the Conservative Party in 1975 and was elected Prime Minister in 1979. Out of an ideological opposition to the principle of state subsidy under her government, "a gulf opened up between the artistic community on the one hand and government and the Arts Council on the other".¹⁵⁰ A structural shift occurred in the profession from public subsidy towards corporate sponsorship (cf. Billington 1994: 348). From the mid-fifties onwards, the British theatre had continually expanded and proved extraordinarily productive. That time was clearly over under the Conservative government of the 1980s.¹⁵¹ In his *Diaries*, Hall notes:

By the late seventies, I thought the battle for subsidy had been won; I thought also that the central position of the arts in our society had been established. It would no longer be a question of whether to pay for them, but only how much. How wrong I was. (2000: 9)

While the sixties and seventies were largely dominated by internal struggles in the field, "the eighties saw a furious assault on most forms of art from external forces" (Roberts 170). With the support of Thatcher's government, economic principles of hierarchisation became once again prominent in the field of artistic production. Commercial success turned into the main criterion for artistic value.¹⁵² The hit-musical became to dominate the theatre of the eighties: "Thatcherism in action", as Billington calls the "most potentially profitable of all theatrical forms" (cf. 2007: 284). A whole new generation of commercial

¹⁵⁰ Billington 1994: 132. See Kershaw 2004 for the influence of Thatcher's government on the theatre (310ff).

¹⁵¹ During the 1980s, the British theatre lost a great part of the autonomy it had gained since the 1950s: "The money distributed [by the Arts Council] ensured that much of British theatre was largely protected from the subsequent growth of the Western capitalist market and the cultural ascendancy of the consumer. But the 1980s witnessed major modifications to this policy for cultural provision, and theatres became subject to increasing marketization and commodification. In effect, British theatres were forced to incorporate into a service-oriented economy and so to compete with other attractions in the burgeoning media, heritage, tourist and related industries" (Kershaw 1999: 269).

¹⁵² By that criterion, however, "Pinter would have been finished after *The Birthday Party* [...] and *The Mousetrap* is the greatest play of the century" (Billington 1994: 273).

entrepreneurs emerged “to fill the vacuum left by Binkie Beaumont, specifically with blockbuster musicals produced by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Cameron Mackintosh” (Shellard 1999: 186). The musical was also the result of a strategy applied by the commercial theatre in order to overcome the dominance of the subsidised sector in the field. The National and the RSC were exercising a “monopoly over the best actors and directors” (Trussler 149). Controlling over 180 actors between them, the two national companies had created a kind of “star famine that was killing the popular (i.e. commercial) theatre” (Wardle 1966: 106). The West End, therefore, had to come up with modes of production that could do without stars. While even the most remarkable plays could hardly achieve any true commercial success without a star in the lead, the musical could.

The musical of the 1980s brought the subsidised theatre in close association with the commercial sector. It is often forgotten that such a worldwide success as *Les Misérables* (1985), for example, was a co-production between a commercial management and the RSC, and that the company was partly sustained by its continuing profits. Subsidised theatres grew increasingly dependent on commercially viable event theatre and co-operations with the West End (cf. Billington 2007: 285). While the arrangement was of “pragmatic benefit” to the RSC, it also set “a dangerous precedent” (291). Commercial producers gained an increasing power over the artistic programming and policy of subsidised companies. “[H]owever well it accorded with the Thatcherite policy of stealthy privatisation of nationalised industries,” states Billington, “it totally changed the rules of the theatrical game” (291):

In the 1980s the publicly subsidised sector [...] helped to regenerate the commercial theatre by supplying it with productions and personnel, and the remarkable popularity of the exportable modern mega-musical [...] reinforced this resurgence. As sponsorship and marketing became the twin pillars supporting theatrical ‘success’, the differences between the subsidised and commercial sectors were eroded and all but vanished in the 1990s. (Kershaw 2004: 381)

7. Conclusion

Following the social trajectory¹⁵³ of Peter Hall's, George Devine's, Laurence Olivier's or Kenneth Tynan's career is most illuminating with regard to the history of post-war British theatre. Based on their successful accumulation of symbolic capital, they all managed to gain a dominant position in the theatrical field and an immense power to define what 'legitimate' theatre was at their time. According to Bourdieu, biographical analysis can lead us to the principles of the "evolution of the work of art in the course of time" (1996: 260). Probably to a greater extent than at any other point in the history of British theatre, it was up to only a handful of charismatic individuals in the mid-20th century to change the face of the whole nation's theatre and to redefine the fundamental values in the profession. Zarhy-Levo suggests that most key positions were shared among a fairly small number of agents who managed to acquire "their authority by virtue of their key positions, constituting [...] a primary source of power that considerably influence[d] developments in the theatre" (2008: 211-212). Hall, Devine, Olivier and Tynan certainly belonged to this small but central "magic circle" of agents with the power to authorise and legitimise drama at that time (cf. 2008: 209-212). Discussing the positions of and relations between a few chosen individuals, how they perceived possibilities and took action, and how their habitus interacted with the objective structure of the field, I have attempted to provide some insight to the structures of authority in the field of theatrical production in post-war London.

"Everyone has to make his own bargain with the system", states Wardle, and speaks of Devine as commanding the "art of operating within prevailing theatrical conditions without capitulating to them inside his own head" (1978: 27). Both Olivier and Hall were similarly talented. Their habituses were perfectly accommodated to the prevailing order in the theatrical field. An agent's habitus, however, is not given as such but develops in response to the objective conditions the agent encounters in the field. Furthermore, an agent only defines his own position in the field in relation to others: "[O]ne loses the essence of what makes for the individuality and even the greatness of the survivors when one ignores the universe of contemporaries with whom and against whom they

¹⁵³ "[T]he *social trajectory* is defined as the *series of positions* successively occupied by the same agent or the same group of agents in successive spaces" (Bourdieu, 1996: 258).

construct themselves” (Bourdieu 1996: 70). Every position in the field, even the dominant one, states Bourdieu, “depends for its very existence, and for the determinations it imposes on its occupants, on the other positions constructing the field;” (1983: 30).

Equally informative as the careers, positions and relations of individual agents in the field is a close look at the establishment of the three major subsidised institutions in post-war London. In their early years, the Royal Court Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Theatre heavily conditioned each other’s existence. The developments which led to the formation of the three companies were closely related and were greatly influenced by the structural conditions present in the theatrical field of the mid-fifties and early sixties. All three institutions emerged from great field-internal needs – for new writing, for a permanent ensemble company or for a representative national institution – and thus they all had their individual *raison d’être* and therefore unique position in the field. In a time when theatre was still heavily dominated by heteronomous principles of hierarchisation, they all reached a degree of public legitimacy beyond the merely economic, and their status and possibilities in the field, therefore, were symbolically autonomous of commercial constraints. Their relative autonomy from the commercial order was made possible through the advent of state subsidy, and their gain of artistic legitimacy (i.e. their fulfilling of certain field-internal needs) justified the grants they received from the Arts Council.

All three institutions, even the radically young ESC and RSC, emerged from a link to the theatrical Establishment, and eventually became part of the Establishment themselves. The structural and aesthetic developments these three companies initiated have shown a major influence on the evolution of British Drama in the 20th century. Yet, the importance of institutions in the history of the theatre, Eyre and Wright argue, is only relative. Theatre companies “have a finite lifespan” and “few manage to sustain artistic ardour beyond seven years” (378):

While theatre will remain inextinguishable, its survival won’t depend on the institutions that have been established for the needs and aspirations of different generations. Buildings can be changed and replaced; institutions can evolve. The large theatre companies – the RSC and NT –

which emerged from a particular time and imperative must adapt. (Eyre, and Wright 378)

Eyre and Wright conclude that “[t]heatre is a medium that lives in the present tense; if it is to survive it must reflect the heartbeat of its time” (378). The ESC of the late fifties, and the RSC and NT of the sixties, certainly accomplished to mirror the time and situation from which these institutions emerged.

In this diploma thesis I have attempted to analyse the conditions under which theatre was being created and received in London in the mid-20th century and how individuals and institutions positioned themselves within the field of theatrical production. Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas of autonomisation, consecration and legitimacy in the field of cultural production appear as powerful conceptual tools to do so. Naturally, this method has required a highly selective approach to the topic. It has always been the goal of this thesis only to present some insights and draw some important connections rather than to produce an outright analysis of the whole theatrical field in post-war London. I have concentrated on the subsidised theatre and looked at the commercial theatre only in its relational importance to the three chosen institutions. An analysis of the whole field would certainly have to include an in-depth discussion of the role of the Arts Council, the actors union Equity as well as the economic interdependences in the West End.¹⁵⁴ Bourdieu’s concept of field and habitus would certainly offer an interesting framework for further analysis of developments or other agents’ positions in the field, which I have touched on only briefly or omitted altogether: Joan Littlewood’s Theatre Workshop, for example, which “predated” the actual “revolution” in British Theatre but “contributed greatly to the New Theatre’s leftist image and its impression of vitality”¹⁵⁵; the mediation of particular writers such as Beckett or Pinter and their entrance into the theatrical canon; the growing influence of Brecht and the French ‘absurdist’ on British drama, or Artaud’s influence upon directors; the role critics or directors played in the careers of certain writers (like the

¹⁵⁴ See Thomsen 93-103 on English theatre in the 1960s and 70s: “Das englische Theater der Gegenwart kennt vier Machtfaktoren, die zählen, wenn es um sein Wohl und Wehe geht. Die Schauspielergewerkschaft Equity, das Arts Council, die wirtschaftlichen Verflechtungen der West End Theater und das touristische Publikum. Der letzte Faktor [...] ist bei 40-60 %iger Auslastung der Sitzkapazität Londoner Theater durch Touristen für die Hauptstadt [...] inzwischen lebenswichtig geworden“ (Thomsen 93).

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Peacock 95. For an excellent discussion of Theatre Workshop see Zarhy-Levo 2008: 63-118.

Hall/Pinter or Tynan/Stoppard relationship); or, of course, the analysis of other influential operative agents in the field such as Peter Brook, whose career is exemplary for the accumulation of symbolic capital and shows how one man's "individual vision is often compelling enough to find and establish a convention, a poetics, for a particular play or production" (Styan 361), or Margaret "Peggy" Ramsay, probably the single most important writer agent of the time who represented a great part of all mentionable English playwrights in the mid-century such as Bond, Wesker, Hare, Ayckbourn and Orton among many others. Both Brook's and Ramsay's influence on the evolution of British theatre, as Littlewood's, Brecht's or Artaud's, was enormous and should offer interesting starting points for further analysis in relation to Bourdieu's theory of the literary field.

"I do believe intensely in the creative value of struggle", states George Devine (qtd. in Wardle 1978: xiii). Bourdieu argues that "the *struggle itself* creates the history of the field" (1980: 106). Innovation and change take place continually and arise out of the very structure of the field, "that is, from the synchronic oppositions between antagonistic positions (dominant/dominated, consecrated/novice, orthodox/heretic, old/young, etc.)" (1996: 239). Robert Stephens suggests that the real achievement of the ESC was, in fact, "symbolic in that it showed how the chains of previous practice might be thrown off" (cf. Shellard 1999: 99). The Royal Court's success had created a new climate in the theatre: suddenly other managements were in "hot competition" with the ESC (cf. Little, and McLaughlin 69). A symbolic order seemed to be established, more prominently than before *Look Back in Anger*, in which two opposing poles (commercial vs. non-commercial, old vs. new) were struggling against each other: The "old guard, sensing an external challenge and a shift in attitudes, became ever more protective of its territory and assertive of its values" while a "radical generation" of young and new entrants to the field "acquired a new militancy and authority"¹⁵⁶. The whole concept of *avant-garde* entails by definition "the very intention of *surpassing*": everything "new" is "inevitably

¹⁵⁶ Cf. Billington 2007: 92-93. Bourdieu: "Those in dominant positions operate essentially defensive strategies, designed to perpetuate the status quo by maintaining themselves and the principles on which their dominance is based" (Bourdieu 1980: 83). They stand in opposition to "those who are inclined to a heretical rupture, to the critique of established forms, to the subversion of the prevailing models and to a return to the purity of origins" (Bourdieu 1996: 206).

situated in relation to what it aims to surpass” (Bourdieu, 1996: 243). Even if the young generation of theatre practitioners was greatly inferior in their resources and even if the kind of theatre they produced attracted only a small minority audience, they gained a large amount of symbolic capital and were thus a legitimate and potent challenge to the commercial pole of production. In the following decades, the tension between the two poles eventually changed the face of British theatre.

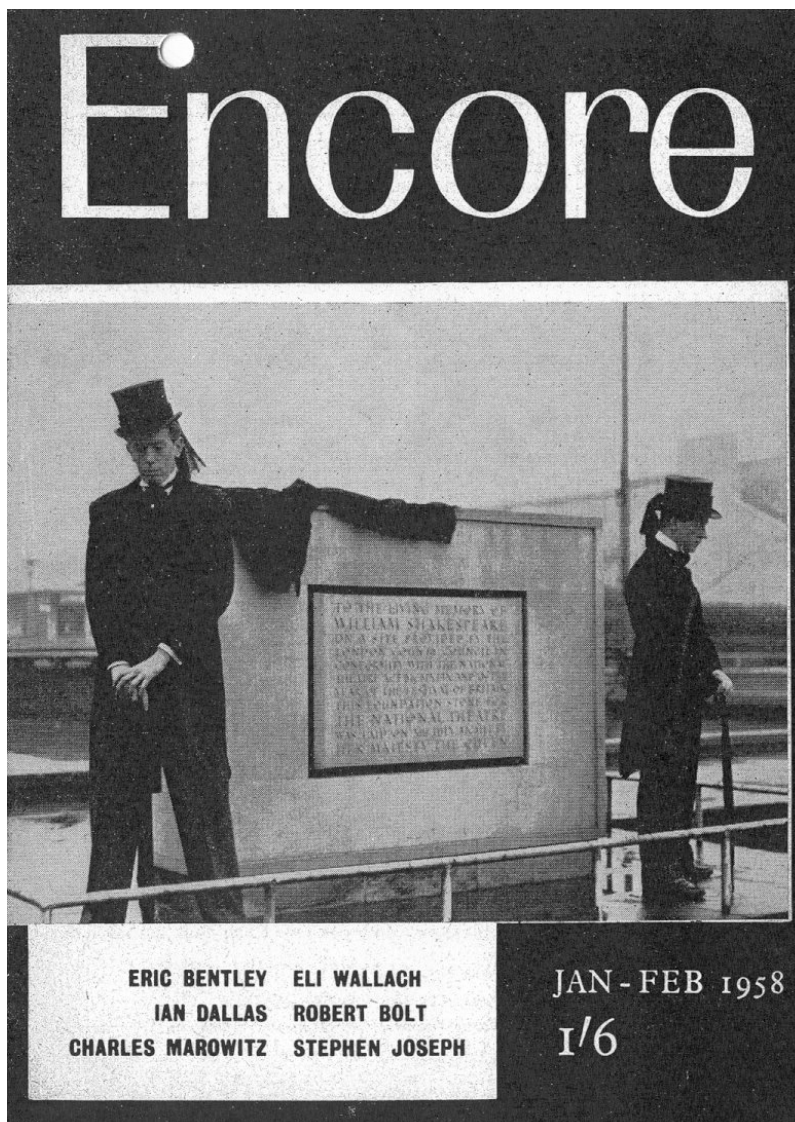
The very logic of any artistic field lies in the struggles that take place between positions that exist within it. As a result, “permanent revolution [has become] the functioning law of the field” (Bourdieu 1996: 124-125). The greatest evidence for the fact that any field of cultural production is fundamentally dynamic and recreates itself continually can be found in the perpetual change of styles and fashions, dominance of certain genres, schools and ideals over time. For no art form is this idea of constant evolution truer than for the theatre: “The theatre is so precarious an institution that it is permanently renewing itself, and must do so or it would become a dead thing”, states Hinchliffe (xiii). Peter Brook agrees that “in order to save the theatre almost everything of the theatre still has to be swept away. The process has hardly begun, and perhaps can never end. The theatre needs its perpetual revolution” (96). The metaphor of the *New Wave* of British drama implies inevitably that each wave will be overcome, at some point, by a new one. Similarly, Eyre and Wright argue that “[e]verything in the world obeys a wave pattern: sound, light, atomic particles. Theatre companies are no exception: their fortunes fluctuate” (52). As a result of perpetual revolution, the development of the theatre can be regarded as an evolutionary process.

8. Appendix

8.1. Acknowledgements

I am much obliged to Sir Peter Hall for taking the time to meet with me and to Maggie Sedwards for making the encounter possible. That mid-November morning undoubtedly formed the climax in the long process entailed in working on this thesis, and talking to one of the prime protagonists in person certainly made for an incredibly exciting way of studying and era and locale somewhat distant from my own. I'm most grateful to Keith Warner for first giving me a direction and to Gary Kahn for pointing out the way. I'd like to thank my professors Univ.-Prof. Dr. Michael Gissenwehrer and Univ.-Prof. Dr. Ewald Mengel for their help and thorough advice. Finally, my deepest appreciation to my parents whose support constitutes the basis upon which everything is built.

8.2. 110 Years War – Encore Magazine



(1) A picture on the cover of *Encore Magazine* of the mock funeral staged by Kenneth Tynan and Richard Findlater at the foundation stone of the National Theatre in 1958.

Goodwin, Clive, and Tom Milne (Eds.). *Encore Magazine* 12, 4.3 (Jan.-Feb. 1958). 1.

The Hundred and Ten Years' War

A TINY HISTORY FOR BEGINNERS

1848 Effingham Wilson, a publisher, issues a proposition for a National Theatre. Supported by Charles Dickens, Charles Kemble and others.

1878 Sir Henry Irving calls for the establishment of a National Theatre.

1880 "The theatre is irresistible; organise the theatre." *Matthew Arnold.*

1904 Publication of a handbook by Harley Granville Barker and William Archer—"A National Theatre: Schemes and Estimates."

1906 "He was one of those who held that it was the duty of the State to be the generous but discriminating parent of the arts and sciences; and if we could only divert national attention from the often senseless process of territorial expansion, and the ugly apparatus of war, to those more graceful and gentler flights of fancy and of ambition which were associated with the theatre and the drama, we should more securely vindicate our claim to be a civilised people (Laughter and tears). Let them think how money could always be easily obtained for any purpose involving the destruction of life and property; let them think with what excitement and interest this people witnessed the construction and launching of a Dreadnought. What a pity it was that some measure of that interest could not be turned to the direction of the launching, say, of a National Theatre" (Cheers).

Winston Churchill.

1909 Publication of a National Theatre handbook containing these six important points :

1. To keep the plays of Shakespeare in the repertoire.
2. To provide whatever else is vital in English classical drama.
3. To prevent recent plays of great merit from falling into oblivion.
4. To produce new plays and further the development of modern drama.
5. To produce translations or representative works of foreign drama, both ancient and modern.
6. To stimulate the art of acting through the opportunities offered to members of the company.

1913 House of Commons debate. Motion: That in the opinion of this House there shall be established a National Theatre . . . Ayes—162 (including Stanley Baldwin). Noes—32.

1929 Barker in a new book on the National Theatre urges that building should begin on the South Bank (by a strange irony, the site he suggested is now occupied by the Royal Festival Hall).

1937 Site acquired by the National Theatre committee in the Cromwell Road.

1946 Site on South Bank offered by the L.C.C.

1949 Debate in the House of Commons. On a unanimous vote the Treasury empowered to pay one million pounds towards the cost of a National Theatre.

1951 Foundation stone laid by the Queen Mother—on the South Bank but not quite in the right place.

1957 "Building must begin in 1958." *Lord Esher.*

1958 Short Remembrance Service held by *ENCORE Magazine*.

The cover photograph was taken during the ceremony. Mourners: Mr. Kenneth Tynan and Mr. Richard Findlater. Photograph by Michael Boys.

And (2) a chronology of "The Hundred and Ten Years' War" for a National Theatre.

Goodwin, Clive, and Tom Milne (Eds.). *Encore Magazine* 12, 4.3 (Jan.-Feb. 1958). 2.

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The Golden Generation – British Theatre 1945-68. British Library/University of Sheffield Theatre Archive Project (TAP). Exhibition at the Folio Society Gallery at the British Library, 27 August – 30 November 2008.

Abstract

Die vorliegende Arbeit behandelt, ausgehend von Pierre Bourdieus Modell vom literarischen Feld, die strukturellen und künstlerischen Entwicklungen in der Londoner Theaterlandschaft zwischen 1956 und 1976. Die Analyse konzentriert sich auf die Entstehung der drei großen subventionierten Theaterkompanien (des Royal Court, der Royal Shakespeare Company und des National Theatre) und auf einige ausgewählte Figuren und deren Position im künstlerischen Feld (z.B. George Devine, Peter Hall, Laurence Olivier und Kenneth Tynan).

Die Mitte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts stellt im Londoner Theater eine Periode großer Vielfalt und Expansion dar: die Förderung junger Dramatiker und neuer Produktions- und Präsentationsformen führte zu einer regelrechten Renaissance im englischen Theater, die oft als *Golden Generation* bezeichnet wird. Der Kampf gegen die Zensur durch den Lord Chamberlain wurde gewonnen und mit der Gründung des Arts Council of Great Britain standen dem Theaterbetrieb zum ersten Mal in der Geschichte des Landes staatliche Subventionen zur Verfügung. In Folge davon entwickelte sich in den Sechzigerjahren ein komplett neuer Produktionszweig – der der großen staatlich subventionierten Theater – zwischen den Polen der kommerziellen und autonomen Produktion. Immer wieder scheinen die Entwicklungen und Innovationen dieser Zeit auf einen kleinen, zentralen Kreis von Handlungsträgern zurückzuführen. Eine wichtige Rolle spielen nicht nur Dramatiker sondern ebenso produzierende und vermittelnde Instanzen wie Regisseure, Intendanten und Kritiker, auf die diese Arbeit ihren Schwerpunkt legt.

Bourdieu suggeriert die Geschichte eines Kunstwerks oder die einer ganzen Kunstsparte durch die Relationen und Kämpfe zu erklären, die im künstlerischen Feld zwischen verschiedenen Positionen existieren bzw. stattfinden. Er basiert sein Modell auf den Begrifflichkeiten Feld, Habitus und Kapital, definiert für jeden Handlungsträger ein Feld der möglichen Handlungen (abhängig von der Position im Feld und dem Besitz von spezifischem Kapital)

und konzentriert sich in seiner Analyse auf Prozesse der Autonomisierung, Legitimation und Hierarchisierung. Ein ähnlich orientierter Analyseansatz liegt dieser Arbeit zu Grunde. Das Londoner Theater der Fünfziger- und Sechzigerjahre war geprägt von einem anwachsenden Kampf zwischen zwei unterschiedlichen Modi der Theaterproduktion: dem des West End, angeführt von kommerziell orientierten Managern, und dem der staatlich subventionierten Repertoirehäuser mit permanenten Schauspielerensembles.

Bourdieu's Feld- und Habitusbegriff, sowie seine Überzeugung, dass jedes künstlerische Feld seiner eigenen autonomen (und beschreibbaren) Logik und Dynamik folgt, die auf dem ständigen Kampf zwischen Orthodoxie und Häresie beruht, bieten die Möglichkeit zu einer neuen Betrachtungsweise der Entwicklungen in der Londoner Theaterszene nach dem zweiten Weltkrieg.

Vienna, February 2010

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